

**Access To Higher Education Among Refugees And Migrants In  
Emergency Situations In Italy: An Opportunity For The So-Called "Lost  
Generation"**

(amended version after public defense)

**Marcela Gola Boutros**

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*To all of those who strive to achieve the equality of rights among all  
peoples and to my beloved parents who taught me  
the meaning of mutual respect*

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**ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG REFUGEES AND  
MIGRANTS IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS IN ITALY: AN OPPORTUNITY  
FOR THE SO-CALLED "LOST GENERATION"**

**MARCELA GOLA BOUTROS**

**Keywords:** refugees, higher education, Italy, scholarships, integration

**Abstract:** This research gathers and analyses the good practices of refugee reception and integration in the Italian higher education system. The methodological approach includes both qualitative and quantitative methods based on interviews and questionnaires to students, professors, and government scholarship secretariats. Several Italian institutions collaborated in this research. The study found that the number of scholarships offered is higher than the candidates who fulfil the necessary requisites to be granted this aid. Since only a few immigrants who arrive in Italy get international protection, the programmes have more vacancies than eligible candidates. The universities are developing a good work, with many participants of the academic community committed to the cause. Students are satisfied with the courses and they believe that this opportunity of studying and validating their professional skills is changing their lives. They feel that from the moment they access university they are no longer labelled as refugees, they become students and professionals with an essential role in global development. Despite the favourable situation, the challenge remains to increase the access of these immigrants to higher education, either by facilitating the enrolment for those who have not yet obtained international protection, spreading the word about the scholarships more efficiently, increasing the number of institutions involved in this cause, or even stimulating private investment. The projects identified are good examples of practices to integrate immigrants into the educational system and a step forward into their incorporation in the labour market. With due caution, these projects can be inspiring for other regions and countries.

**Palavras-chave:** refugiados, ensino superior, Itália, bolsas de estudo, integração

**Resumo:** Esta pesquisa reúne e analisa as boas práticas de recepção e integração de refugiados no sistema de ensino superior italiano. Para a sua realização, foram utilizados métodos qualitativos e quantitativos de recolha de dados, tais como entrevistas e inquéritos a estudantes, professores e órgãos governamentais responsáveis pelos programas de bolsas de estudo. Várias instituições de ensino italianas participaram desta pesquisa. O estudo concluiu que o número de bolsas de estudo disponíveis é maior do que o de candidatos que preenchem os requisitos mínimos para receberem este auxílio. São poucos os imigrantes em Itália que conseguem a concessão de proteção internacional, e por essa razão os programas de bolsa têm mais vagas do que candidatos elegíveis. As universidades estão desenvolvendo um bom trabalho, já que muitos dos participantes da comunidade académica estão comprometidos com esta causa. Os estudantes estão satisfeitos com os cursos que escolheram, e acreditam que a oportunidade de estudar e validar suas qualificações profissionais está mesmo a mudar suas vidas. Eles sentem que a partir do momento em que têm acesso à universidade, não são mais rotulados como refugiados, mas reconhecidos como estudantes e profissionais com um papel fundamental no desenvolvimento global. Apesar da situação positiva, permanece o desafio de aumentar o acesso destes imigrantes ao ensino superior, seja facilitando a inscrição para aqueles que ainda não obtiveram a proteção internacional – possivelmente matriculando-os como estudantes internacionais regulares, aumentando a divulgação dessa possibilidade de acesso, o número de instituições de ensino envolvidas nessa causa, ou, ainda, estimulando o investimento da iniciativa privada. Os projetos identificados são bons exemplos do que pode ser feito em prol da integração de imigrantes no sistema de ensino e, consequentemente, no mercado de trabalho. Com as devidas adaptações, estes projetos poderão ser inspiradores para outras regiões ou países.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADISU	Agency for the Right to University Studies
AMFI	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
Anvur	National agency for the evaluation of the university and research system
ArmENIC	Armenian Information Centre for Academic Recognition and Mobility
CNVQR	Activation of the National Coordination on the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications
CAP	University centre for life-long learning
CARA	Acceptance Centre for Asylum Applicants
CEMI	Centre for Migration, Social Integration and Intercultural Communication
CFU	Italian University Credits
CIEP	International Centre for French Studies
CIMEA	Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence
Cinformi	Immigration Information Centre
CRUI	Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
NUFFIC	Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation
EADTU	European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KMK	Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany
LRC	Lisbon Recognition Convention
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SPRAR	Protection System for Asylum Applicants and Refugees
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of reception and integration of immigrants in emergency situation is, theoretically, a responsibility that must be shared globally. However, the geographic position of countries determines who will receive most of those who flee from inhumane conditions caused by war, scarcity of resources and natural disasters.

Faced with this reality and following the so-called “refugee crisis”, European countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea<sup>1</sup> have become the main gateways to the continent for immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Those who are granted refugee status must battle to find a job or, in fewer cases, to resume their studies. More than 80% of the asylum applicants in Italy in the years of 2015 and 2016 were aged between 18 and 34 years old (Eurostat, 2018a). This means that the majority of refugees arriving in the country with the intention to stay are in their working age, and are also part of the age group that could have access to higher education. A report published by the UNHCR (2016) states that 34% of the world's youth attends university. Among refugees, this figure drops to only 1%.

Higher education is of the utmost importance for young refugees in order to provide them with economic means that will help them to establish with dignity in the host countries. Additionally, the host States can benefit from a skilled and young workforce.

Taking these considerations into account and according to the importance of Italy as the present main gateway for immigrants in emergency situation trying to have access

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<sup>1</sup> Migration flows to EU by sea are carried out through three main routes: the Eastern Mediterranean, the Central Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean.

In 2015, with the aggravation of the wars in the Middle East, the Eastern Route became the busiest one, by which more than 885,000 migrants disembarked in the EU. Most of them arrived in the Greek Islands after passing through Turkey. Syrians, Afghans and Somalis were the main nationalities using this passage at the time (Frontex, 2018b).

The Central Route connects the North African countries with Malta and the Italian regions of Lampedusa, Sicily, Calabria and Apulia. One of the most serious issues concerning this route is the well established network of people smugglers in Libya, which gathers thousands of migrants in extremely precarious and dangerous boats towards Europe (Frontex, 2018a).

The passage between North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula is the Western Route, which is mainly used by migrants from Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal and the Sub-Saharan Africa. The migration flows through this route intensified in 2014 due to the worsening of wars in Mali, Sudan and Nigeria (Eurocid, 2017).

to the EU, the primary goal of this dissertation is to identify and explore the measures being adopted by the government – both central and regional – and academic institutions to integrate asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection into Italian universities. The research analyses the challenges they face in order to have access to higher education and what could be improved to make the most of their potential, both to themselves and the hosting country. Providing education for these foreign students represents a much more significant step than giving just the basics to survival, it symbolizes the restoration of their dignity after a long period of difficulties, loss and suffering. Education can provide these young people with the chance to not only withstand but also to recover from traumatic situations, to be resilient.

The relevance of this study lies in the presentation of good practices that could be reproduced, either globally or partially, somewhere else, keeping in mind though that the complete transferability of these projects is quite tricky due to the variety of variables involved. A clear depiction of how these projects take place, what can be improved and how they could reach more people is vital to identify which players and circumstances are essential in the construction of a new Europe, in need of adaptation due to its changing demographic characteristics. How is the recognition of credentials obtained by the immigrants in their countries of origin done in Italy? Who are the intervening actors in the process of access of asylum-seekers to higher education institutions and what roles do they play? How disseminated is the information concerning the access of refugees and asylum-seekers to the Italian higher education institutions? How is the performance of these students in their courses? Do they receive the appropriate support to grow academically? The research aims to answer these questions, since knowing the answers is fundamental to gauge the human potential that comes along with immigration and shelter immigrants from the limbo of oblivion, giving them the necessary tools to live in dignity.

One might wonder why a Brazilian student in a Portuguese university would write a thesis in English instead of in her mother tongue. It would certainly be easier if I had chosen to write it in Portuguese. However, the message I want to transmit would be limited to the Portuguese-reading community, which is huge on a worldwide scale but reduced among the people who live on the Northern hemisphere.

Fortunately, there are other means to reach a wider audience. The one I found was writing this material in English, since I wish the people who cooperated in this study to be able to read it, understand it, share their opinions about it and further help the debate.

Concerning the organisation of this piece of research, Chapter I explains the methodological approach chosen to guide the research, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve relevant results. Chapter II provides a general theoretical approach to the immigration crisis in Europe and the EU asylum system. Following that, chapter III describes the Italian asylum system and its particularities about the access of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection to Italy's higher education system. In Chapter III the characteristics of the scholarships available and the process that immigrants go through to learn Italian are explained.

Chapter IV comprises the case study and is divided in two sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter describes the programmes available for asylum-seekers and international protection holders in the universities that agreed to participate in this research. Guidelines, available courses, obstacles that must be overcome by the universities in order to support this particular group of students and other details are also explored.

The second sub-chapter analyses the interviews with the students, collecting their impressions about the effectiveness of the programmes, their weaknesses and strengths, what can be improved and what are the possibilities to reach a higher number of refugees. This sub-chapter is followed by the conclusion, which gathers some good practices that could be disseminated throughout the EU. Such good practices can be used as models to enable not only the basics for refugees' survival, but a real chance of development and use of their skills to their own benefit and the reconstruction of their countries of origin.

## **I. Methodology**

### **I.1. Research methods**

This case study is based on a qualitative-quantitative divide that combines multiple methods of research. The choice of Italy was based on the fact that this is the country that received the highest number of asylum-seekers since the EU-Turkey

agreement in 2016. Furthermore, Italy's Ministero dell'Interno<sup>2</sup> launched the call for scholarships in the same year. Some Italian universities were already providing scholarships for international protection holders in previous years or started to provide it in 2016 without the help of the government, relying on players of the private initiative to do so. For this reason, studying the Italian case regarding the access to higher education among asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection is of the utmost importance to the current migratory situation in Europe.

The main tools used to collect data from students, HEIs and government bodies involved in the study were qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys. Further, the method of participant observation and document analysis - mostly official documents, non-governmental reports and written articles published in renowned sources of the online media (i.e. journal articles) - were used as a complement to the surveys and interviews.

In the beginning, only qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews (Meeteren, Mascini, & Berg, 2015) were to be performed with the migrants and representatives of the HEIs and government bodies. Even though a high amount of information was gathered through the interviews, the possibility of reaching more subjects by asking for their participation in quantitative surveys was extremely beneficial for the research. The students who participated in the survey seemed to feel more comfortable to provide a rather critic evaluation of their integration process and the institutions/individuals who are in charge of it.

In total, 22 students and staff members participated in this research. Seven students and five staff members of the universities gave interviews, while nine students and two staff members of the universities answered the quantitative surveys [Table 1].

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Interior

*Table 1. Universities that participated in the research*

Universities that participated in the research	Staff Members	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro</li> <li>• Università degli Studi di Pavia</li> <li>• Università Telematica Uninettuno</li> <li>• Università del Salento</li> </ul>
		Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Università degli Studi di Ferrara</li> <li>• Università di Trento</li> </ul>
	Students	Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro</li> <li>• Università degli Studi di Ferrara</li> <li>• Università del Salento</li> <li>• Università di Trento</li> </ul>
		Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Università degli Studi di Messina</li> <li>• Università degli Studi di Torino</li> </ul>

Among the students, nine were women and seven were men. Ten of them were between 21 and 29 years old, five between 30 and 39 and one between 40 and 49 years old. Regarding their status, 12 were refugees, three were beneficiaries of humanitarian protection and one was an asylum seeker. Their origins were diverse: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Pakistan, Syria and Ukraine. The identities of the students who participated in this research - both those who answered the quantitative surveys and those who granted interviews - will be kept anonymous. They will be referred to in this study by the letter S plus numbers (S1 to S16) [Table 2]. The interviews and quantitative surveys were done between April and August 2018.

Table 2. Students who participated in the research

Student	Origin	Gender	Age	Status	Method
S1	Palestine	M	30	Refugee	Interview
S2	Yemen	F	48	Refugee	
S3	Pakistan	M	30	Refugee	
S4	Afghanistan	F	25	Refugee	
S5	Gambia	M	21	Refugee	
S6	Syria	F	25	Refugee	
S14	Pakistan	M	30	Refugee	
S7	Ukraine	F	26	Refugee	Quantitative survey
S8	Syria	F	25	Refugee	
S9	Libya	F	28	Refugee	
S10	Iraq	M	25	Refugee	
S11	Guinea	M	29	Asylum Seeker	
S12	Cameroon	F	26	Humanitarian Protection	
S13	Ivory Coast	F	30	Humanitarian Protection	
S15	Gambia	M	34	Humanitarian Protection	
S16	Eritrea	F	21	Refugee	

The students who were interviewed provided a more in-depth understanding of their situation within the Italian immigration system and HEIs. The dynamics and flow of the interviews also supported a more detailed depiction of the strengths and weaknesses of the scholarship programmes. On the other hand, when answering the quantitative survey, the students seemed to be more comfortable to provide a sincere evaluation of the work being done by the universities' staff due to the complete anonymity of their testimonials – they were asked to rate the quality of the services provided and the warmth of the welcoming in such institutions. Therefore, this method was more efficient to get an honest answer about the services offered and the friendliness with which the asylum-seekers and international protection holders were received and treated in Italy.

The immigrants referred to in this case study were categorised in four different status: asylum-seekers, refugees, subsidiary protection holders and humanitarian protection holders. Refugees and subsidiary protection holders have similar rights in Italy and are eligible for public and private funded scholarships. Humanitarian protection holders are allowed to be in the country for a shorter period than refugees and subsidiary protection holders and are entitled to a more limited set of rights – namely the access to government scholarships, to which they are not eligible for. Asylum-seekers are the ones who have not received any kind of international protection yet, but have submitted an



asylum claim and are waiting for a decision from the government. By law, they are not admissible in Italian universities – except for a few specific situations referred further ahead in this study.

The participant observation method was performed as a complement of the information gathered through interviews and surveys. The teaching and learning of the Italian language was mentioned as a priority by most students and professors. The first experience that asylum-seekers have with the Italian language usually takes place in schools where they can enrol in basic level courses for free. Being in Italy for four months, between April and July 2018, I did the full basic course for the initial levels A1 and A2 (Council of Europe, 2001) in one of the public schools in Puglia where this service is available. Therefore, I was able to have a better understanding of what kind of difficulties immigrants go through during the learning process, and the same for the quality of the course (regarding the learning environment, the experience of the teachers, the quality of the materials and so on).

I did not speak Italian at the beginning of the research, but I naturally did not experience the same level of learning difficulties that most asylum-seekers do, since my mother tongue is Latin-based. Portuguese is much more similar to Italian than the majority of the languages spoken in Africa, Asia and the Middle-East, where most of the immigrants in Italy come from. However, I was able to observe their struggles and the kind of support they received to overcome the challenges. It was an intensive course held five times a week for two months.

In the last phase of this study, the comparative method was used to juxtapose the various initiatives that enable the access of asylum-seekers and international protection holders to higher education in Italy and the results achieved by the institutions involved. The results of the comparison are discussed at the conclusion, following the presentation and analyses of the data collected throughout the research. According to Bloemraad (2013, p. 29), it is only through comparison that “we can de-centre what is taken for granted in a particular time or place”.

## I.2. Interviews selection criteria and data analysis

The first step regarding the interviewees' selection criteria was to rank the universities which could take part in the study. The search for HEI that provided scholarships for asylum-seekers and international protection holders was done online. All institutions that had information about this matter on their websites, or those that were mentioned at the inHERE project's good practice catalogue (inHERE Project, 2018), or yet those that were mentioned in other sources (i.e. journal articles and government websites) were contacted via e-mail or over the phone. All of the HEI that responded and had at least one student with the required immigration status enrolled were added to this study. From the moment these institutions agreed to be part of the research, they were asked to provide the contact of the students who were to be interviewed, as well as those of the staff member(s) responsible or working directly with the hosting and incorporation of these students in the HEI.

All universities asked for the students' permission before giving their contacts. Some arranged face-to-face meetings with the students whereas others gave me the student's contacts. Not all universities provided me with the contacts of staff members and students – some allowed interviews only with the staff members, others simply provided the students' contacts. The universities that did not respond within a reasonable timeframe were asked to answer the staff's survey and to forward the students' survey to students.

There were also cases in which the universities allowed staff members to give interviews about the work that was being carried out at the institutions, but the rectors did not allow access to students. In some of those cases, I was able to reach the students without the help of the university, since I was living in Italy. By reaching them on occasions where the universities were not involved, the students had the autonomy to decide whether if they wanted to participate and share their experiences or not.

Once the interviewees agreed to participate, face-to-face meetings and Skype calls were arranged. Such interviews were semi-structured, following scripts – both for students [annex 1] and staff members [annex 2] – that were used only as guidance for the information to be collected. The students and staff members were free to approach any additional matters that they considered to be relevant, allowing them “to hint at possibly omitted areas of inquiry” (Barglowski et al., 2018, p. 176).

A profile was built for each of the students regarding their gender, age, religion, marital and legal status, language skills and educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews with the staff members were carried out with the purpose of understanding the students' needs and the challenges faced by the universities in supporting them. The Central Direction of the Ministero dell'Interno also collaborated answering several questions regarding their scholarships' programme and the Italian reception system for asylum-seekers.

As for the data analysis, all of the interviews were fully transcribed and sent back to the interviewees to confirm if the information collected was correct and if they would like to make any changes in their speeches. Once I received the feedback from the interviewees, the collected data was analysed and interpreted, in a permanent dialogue and interaction with the theoretical material collected on the documents consulted. That led me to keep in touch with the interviewees for follow-up questions aiming further clarifications regarding the topics discussed. Transcribing the interviews was also a useful tool to add essential questions to be made to the next interviewees.

What I tried to achieve through the interpretation of the interviews was to

(a) avoid stereotypical and clichéd portrayals of the researched groups; (b) give the interviewees the opportunity to maintain their voices and views in the final representation of data (Amelina & Faist, 2012); and (c) maintain awareness of data collection as an active process in which the positions of both researcher and interviewee are socially constructed and embedded. (Bargłowski et al., 2018, p. 185)

The surveys were internet-mediated, created and shared using Google Forms, a comprehensive platform that enables the creation of multiple choice questions and scale ratings, as well as open and closed questions to be answered with a higher or lower number of words. I tried to use the survey as a platform to gather also qualitative data, since all of the answer spaces were designed for long-length responses.

The analysis of all the data collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods enabled an in-depth analysis of the situation of asylum-seekers and international protection holders who succeeded to access higher education in Italy.

## II. Refugees and asylum in Europe: an overview of recent trends

In 2015, more than one million people arrived in Europe by sea, and most landed on the Greek coast. The situation changed in 2016 though, when the EU-Turkey Statement<sup>3</sup> held back the flow of migrants through the Eastern Mediterranean, turning the Central Mediterranean route into the busiest of all. Hence, Italy has become the country where the highest number of refugees reach EU ground. According to the UNHCR (2016), 153,842 people reached Italy through the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, while 856,723 reached Greece. In 2016, Italy mounted to 181,490 arrivals, compared to 173,450 in Greece, and in 2017 the difference was even more significant [Figures 1 and 2].

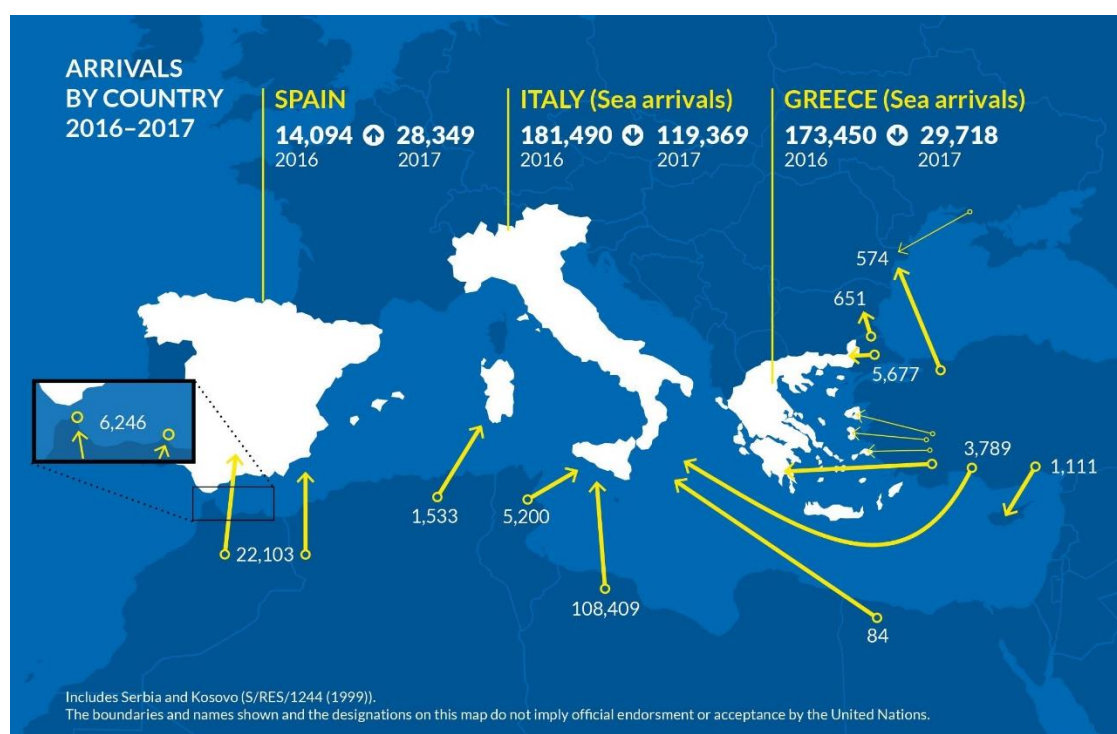


Figure 1. Arrivals by country 2016-2017

Source: Copyright 2018 by UNHCR (*Desperate Journeys Jan 2017 to Mar 2018*).

<sup>3</sup> The EU-Turkey Statement aims to control the flux of migrants to the European Union by determining that all new immigrants arriving in the Greek Islands in an irregular situation will be returned to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or if their application is rejected. The statement also establishes that for each Syrian immigrant returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey will be reinstated in the EU (European Commission, 2016).



Figure 2. Arrivals to Italy, Spain and Greece

Source: Adapted from <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>. Copyright 2018 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

The United Nations (2017) recently called for greater international solidarity with immigrants and refugees arriving on the Italian coast. The Italian government urged the repatriation of a higher number of economic migrants, the relocation of refugees to EU countries, as well as financial resources and agreements that strengthen the borders between Libya and Niger to control the influx of immigrants to Italy (Marchetti, 2017).

Given the need to accommodate such large number of asylum-seekers in Italy and Greece, the EU put into practice the guidelines of the Dublin III Regulation, which established that a single Member State is responsible for the examination of an asylum application.

“The criteria for establishing responsibility run, in hierarchical order, from family considerations to recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly” (European Commission, 2017a).

The EU also has an active asylum seeker relocation programme in which the Member States receiving migrants from other EU countries are given €6,000 for each resettled person, while Italy, Greece and Hungary receive €500 to cover the transportation

costs for each person sent. This system only applies to applicants for whom the average rate of recognition of international protection in the EU is over 75% (European Commission, 2015). According to the fifteenth report on relocation and resettlement (European Commission, 2017b, p. 3):

The pace of relocation shows a continuous positive upward trend with an average of 2,300 relocations per month since February 2017. The majority of Member States are pledging and relocating on a regular basis. However, additional efforts from all Member States of relocation are needed to ensure relocation of all those eligible in Italy and Greece.

The Asylum Procedures Directive was adopted likewise to improve the asylum process, providing efficient and fair decisions, and was to be transposed into EU countries' national legislation by 2015 (European Commission, 2018). However, some Member States are not able to accomplish the time-limit of six months settled by the Directive for the examination of the asylum applications. “(...) civil society organisations have referred to average processing times of 18 months in Italy, one to two years in Spain, or two years for well-founded cases in Cyprus” (Asylum Information Database, 2016, p. 10).

In 2017, the EU Member States granted international protection status to 538,000 asylum-seekers – 25% less than in 2016 – and approximately 1 million first instance decisions were issued.

In 2017, nearly half (46 %) of EU-28 first instance asylum decisions resulted in positive outcomes, that is grants of refugee or subsidiary protection status, or an authorisation to stay for humanitarian reasons. For first instance decisions, some 23 % of all positive decisions in the EU-28 in 2017 resulted in grants of refugee status (Eurostat, 2018b).

In 2017, about 222,000 people were given refugee status in the EU at first instance, other 159,000 were granted subsidiary protection status, and 63,000 obtained permits to stay for humanitarian reasons. The EU countries who granted the highest number of

international protection status at first instance in 2017 were Ireland (89%), Lithuania (78%) and Latvia (74%). Contrariwise, the countries with the highest rates of rejection of first instance asylum claims were the Czech Republic, Poland and France – rejection rates of more than 70% (Eurostat, 2018b).

As for Italy, at the beginning of 2015, the country had 45,749 pending asylum applications, and during the following months, other 83,243 were added. It represented 9% of all EU asylum requests<sup>4</sup>. Among them, 71,410 decisions were taken, being 41,730 (58%) rejected and 29,614 (41%) accepted<sup>5</sup>. At the beginning of 2016, 60,156 pending asylum applications represented an increase of 31% comparatively to the previous year, to which other 122,972 were added. The number of applications corresponded to 14% of all EU requests<sup>6</sup> at the time. 54,469 (60%) were rejected and 35,404 recognized (39%), out of the 89,873 decisions taken until December<sup>7</sup>. Finally, at the beginning of 2017 Italy had 152,351 pending asylum claims– an upsurge of 153% in comparison to 2016. Another 126,376 applications were made during that year. That represented 39% of all EU claims<sup>8</sup>. Out of 92,179 decisions, 46,376 (50%) were rejected and 31,700 (34%) were recognized<sup>9</sup> (UNHCR, 2017).

As we can see in the graphic below [Figure 3], of all asylum decisions taken by the Italian authorities throughout 2015, 2016 and 2017, only 38% were accepted. Considering the statistics published by the UNHCR, it is possible to visualise that most asylum-seekers in Italy never managed to become refugees or to obtain another kind of international protection. Despite the images of many boats full of “refugees”

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<sup>4</sup> 1,322,845 asylum claims were registered in EU28 in 2015 (Eurostat, 2018a).

<sup>5</sup> The remaining 1% of the cases were closed on non-substantive grounds (withdrawn applications, asylum claimants who died before the interview or did not shown up for other reasons, and applications considered inadmissible to the procedure).

<sup>6</sup> 1,260,910 asylum claims were registered in EU28 in 2016 (Eurostat, 2018a).

<sup>7</sup> The remaining 1% of the cases were closed on non-substantive grounds (withdrawn applications, asylum claimants who died before the interview or did not shown up for other reasons, and applications considered inadmissible to the procedure).

<sup>8</sup> 712,235 asylum claims were registered in EU28 in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018a).

<sup>9</sup> The remaining 16% of the cases were closed on non-substantive grounds (withdrawn applications, asylum claimants who died before the interview or did not shown up for other reasons, and applications considered inadmissible to the procedure).

disembarking on the Italian coast, giving the impression that the country is actually overloaded by immigrants, in fact, those who stay are very few.

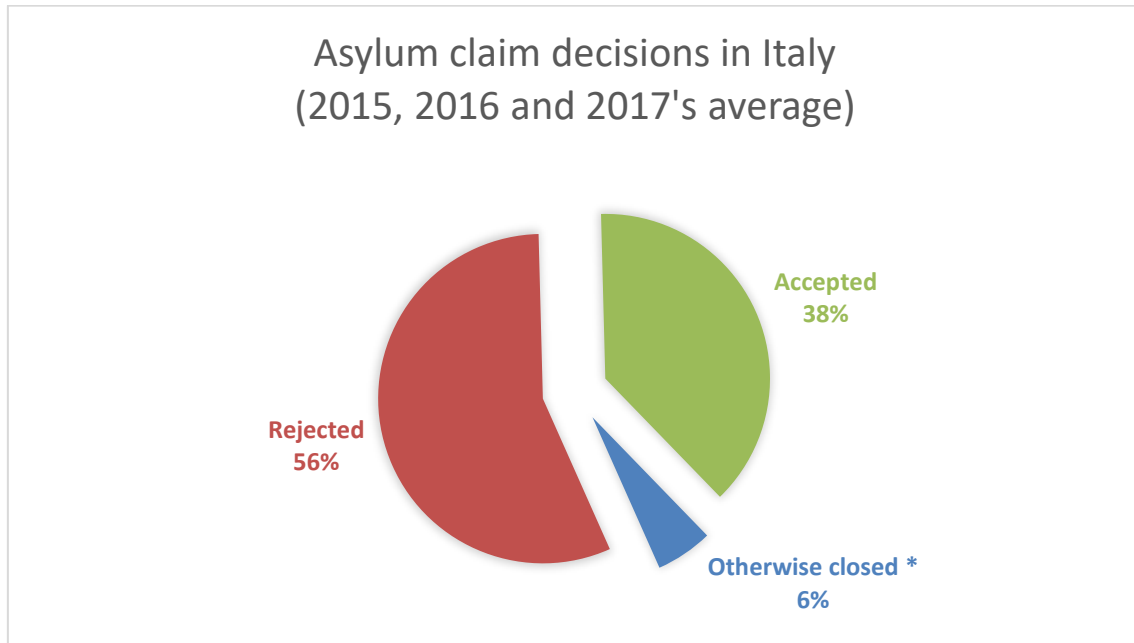


Figure 3. Asylum claim decisions in Italy.

Source: Adapted from Ministero dell'Interno, Dipartimento per le Libertà Civili e l'Immigrazione. Url: [http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/riepilogo\\_dati\\_2015\\_2016\\_0.pdf](http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/riepilogo_dati_2015_2016_0.pdf)

\* "Otherwise closed" is the denomination given by the UNHCR for cases that are closed on non-substantive grounds (withdrawn applications, asylum claimants who died before or did not show up for the interview, and applications considered inadmissible to the procedure).

Europe is going through a demographic crisis that is bound to worsen in the coming decades. According to Eurostat (2018c), "the number of elderly people in the EU-28 rose, over the last two decades, at a rate that was almost six times as fast as for the overall population". At the beginning of 2016, there were almost 98 million people aged 65 years and over in the EU, representing 19.2 % of the EU population. The elderly accounted for more than one-fifth of the total population in Italy, Greece, Germany, Portugal, Finland and Bulgaria. Between 2001 and 2016, the number of older adults in the EU increased by 26.6 %. In 2015, in Italy, 22.4% of the population was aged 65 or older, and estimates indicated that this percentage would increase to 34.6% by 2050 (United Nations, 2017b).

The academic training of young people who will be better prepared to join the labour force in a continent where the death rate has been surpassing the birth rate since



2015 (Eurostat, 2017) is substantial so that Europe can thrive economically. With a huge ageing population and a lack of effective strategies - being the welcoming and skilling of immigrants one of them - the EU is facing significant challenges in maintaining its development standards.

In 2018 more than 45% of foreign-born adults living in Italy have not completed upper secondary education, and “[...] the share of tertiary-educated adults is generally low, regardless of whether they are native-born (20%) or foreign-born (14%) and regardless of their age at arrival in the country” (OECD, 2018, p. 49). Also, the percentage of adults (native or foreign-born) who achieve tertiary-education in Italy is low: only 19%. Among the foreign-born, about 50% have not even completed the upper secondary education (OECD, 2018). Italy still has a long way to go in terms of providing education to both its native-born and foreign-born population.

A study about the inclusion of immigrants – both economic migrants and international protection holders – into European society mentioned, back in 2003, the importance of tertiary education as a means to achieve satisfactory levels of integration (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003). On the other hand, a research about migrants in German found out that even though migrants have improved their educational level, they face severe integration problems in the labour market (Kogan, 2011). When it comes to asylum seekers and refugees, there are additional difficulties related to the nature of the migratory process – which many times involves the interruption of their education path. Hooper, Salant, & Desiderio (2017) state that assisting migrants to access the labour market “is crucial to their successful integration into these communities, as it reduces their reliance on local welfare systems and strengthens their broader social inclusion”. The same principle applies in regard to enabling refugees’ access to higher education.

Marcu et al (2018) points to the fact that active labour market policies, along with the improvement of migrants’ educational background towards secondary education, results in a decrease of the unemployment rates. Their study also confirms what Kogan (2011) found out in Germany: having tertiary education is not supporting the migrants’ integration into host countries. However, that does not mean that enabling the access of migrants to tertiary education is useless. On the contrary, it reinforces “the need for a reconfiguration of the passive labour market policies, governmental support granted to research and development activities deployed within the business sector, and tertiary

education strategies, especially for specific skills and competences recognition among foreign population” (N. Marcu et al., 2018). The results of the aforementioned study underline the importance of education, employment and vocational training as a means for the social inclusion of migrants.

Darling (2016) investigated the role of cities as spaces of refugee politics, exploring the ways that many forced migrants experience borders. The author also discussed the concept of dispersal, saying that it should not be faced as an instant solution to accommodate asylum seekers while they await the decision on their asylum claims. Dispersal must involve the exchange of information to prepare the communities for longer-term settlement, that is, it should work as a starting point for integration. According to Darling (2016), “cities are situated as a strategic location for the enforcement of border control ‘within’ the nation-state, thereby feeding into wider discussions of the shift from territorially fixed border ‘lines’ to territorially diffuse border ‘functions’”. That can be perceived when we take a deeper look at the difficulties faced by asylum-seekers and refugees to access institutions and its services, such as health, education and employment. Those are the borders within nations.

Marcu (2018) did research on the access of refugees to Spanish higher education system. She found out that there is an absence of government-funded study grants for asylum seekers in Spain. On the other hand, promising initiatives such as the “Student-refugees Welcome Program”, promoted by the European University Association (EUA), are being developed:

This program-campaign aims to showcase and document the commitment of higher education institutions and organizations to supporting refugees. It has been opened expressly to help (Syrian and Iraqi) recognized refugees start or continue with their academic studies. This initiative, which exists throughout the EU, allows recognized refugees who had to interrupt their studies in their country of origin to apply to follow a regular university program by means of introducing a separate online registration for student-refugees that is different to the “normal” direct application for EU students. This “special” application program involves a pre-screening of the refugee candidate students.

The study concludes that HEIs in Spain must keep working to achieve better results for the sustainable integration of refugee students – especially by enhancing its own interaction with institutions from both the public and private sectors. Further, Marcu (2018) points to the role of the universities as “an engine to strengthen the work of city councils and NGOs; raise awareness about the reality of refugees to the host society and to the actors who will intervene in one way or another in their reception and integration (companies, unions, associations, and education centres)”.

In the scope of EU’s cooperation to enhance refugee’s integration, Ledoux et al (2018) reviewed the block’s current policies to enable the access of migrants to healthcare in Spain, Portugal and Ireland. The authors emphasise “the growing attention paid to migrants’ health as attested by the recent developments of funded research, conferences, and recommendations”, and explain that “these actions have a limited and not consistent impact all over the Union”. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the EU prioritises migrants’ health, monitoring and supporting its implementation in every government’s agenda. Analogously, the EU faces the same need in regard to refugees’ access to higher education. Ledoux et al (2018) also highlight the need of Europe to accommodate and include migrants into society due to the ageing of the European population, besides pointing to the fact that the EU “cannot claim to be founded on the values of equality, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance and solidarity if it keeps a blind eye on this issue”.

### **III. The Italian situation regarding access to higher education for refugees**

According to the Italian decree of 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015 (Gazzeta Ufficiale, 2015), an asylum-seeker is a foreign national who applied for international protection and is waiting for a final decision. Legally there are no time limits for a foreigner to apply for international protection (Gazzeta Ufficiale, 2008). Thus, the non-immediate submission of an application cannot justify its rejection or exclusion.

In Italy, the application for international protection can be made with the police in the border control units or at the *questura*<sup>10</sup>. The asylum-seekers are allowed to stay in

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<sup>10</sup> Italian police provincial headquarters.

Italy while waiting for the government's decision (Integrazione Migranti, 2018a). That is when most of them spend time at the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Applicants and Refugees) and CARA (Acceptance Centre for Asylum Applicants) centres, designed to receive asylum applicants who do not have the financial means to achieve the minimum life quality standards. Once the request for protection is verified by the local prefectures where the applicant lives, he or she will be placed at one of the SPRAR units. In a situation where there are no rooms available in one of those centres, the asylum-seeker is hosted at one of the CARA centres. When the CARA centres are not available to receive more applicants, the asylum-seeker is entitled to receive financial aid from the Prefecture in order to live with minimum quality standards until a vacancy is available in one of the centres (Integrazione Migranti, 2018d).

According to the Italian legislation, the international protection statuses comprises refugee and subsidiary protection, and when none of those apply, the asylum-seeker might be granted humanitarian protection (Presidente della Repubblica, 2007). Italy follows the definition of refugee as described in the 1<sup>st</sup> article of the Geneva's Convention of 1951 (United Nations, 1951), which states that a refugee is a person who

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Subsidiary protection status might be given to third country nationals or stateless people whose characteristics do not match the requirements to be granted refugee status, but have well-founded reasons to believe that returning to their countries of origin or of habitual residence (in case of stateless people) would expose them to a position in which their integrity would be at risk. (Integrazione Migranti, 2018e).

The Territorial Commissions decides the eligibility of applicants for the recognition of international protection. There are ten Territorial Commissions throughout Italy. They are constituted by "an official of the Prefecture in quality of president, a representative of the State police, an official of the local body and a member of the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees” (Integrazione Migranti, 2018c). Every asylum-seeker has the right to explain his/her situation and tell his/her story to the Commission. Applicants are allowed to express themselves in their own languages during the audience, with the help of a translator to make himself/herself understood. They are also allowed to receive legal support – whose honoraria should be paid by the applicant himself/herself. It comes without saying that asylum-seekers who do not have financial means to sustain themselves – being in need of SPRAR and CARA’s support to have a place to live and food – are hardly ever able to bear the costs of a lawyer. Asylum-seekers in this situation have the right to benefit from free of charge legal assistance.

When the Commission considers that there is not enough evidence or necessary conditions to match the granting of refugee or subsidiary protection status to an applicant, there is also the possibility of granting humanitarian protection status to the asylum-seeker. If none of the three statuses is considered applicable, the request is denied. Applicants who have their requests denied may appeal against the Commission’s decision up to thirty days after receiving the notification. This time frame is reduced to fifteen days for those applicants who were sent to CARA centres or detained at the CIEs – identification and expulsion centres (Integrazione Migranti, 2018c).

SPRAR centres are meant to provide board and lodging, welfare services and health care, legal-administrative protection, language courses and integration measures. The experiences of asylum-seekers in those reception centres are sometimes not as decent as it should be. S4 (2018), for instance, stated that the people she met in the refugee camp put her in trouble and disturbed her a lot. Those who repeatedly infringe the reception centre rules or have violent behaviours might have their reception rights revoked.

After being granted international protection status or humanitarian protection, the beneficiaries have an additional six months to benefit from reception facilities. Under exceptional circumstances, this period can be prolonged for another six months. International protection applicants have the authorisation to work starting from the sixth month that follows the submission of their asylum request.

When there is a need of verifying the asylum-seekers’ nationality or identity, the *questura* may send them to CARA centres before enabling their access to the SPRAR network. This is also the procedure when the applicant has submitted his/her asylum request after being arrested for evading or attempting to evade border control or when the

applicant has been arrested due to irregularities concerning his/her residence permit before submitting his/her application. Ideally, asylum-seekers should not be hosted in CARA centres for more than 35 days under any circumstances. After this period, applicants must be provided with asylum residence permits and be sent to a SPRAR centre – in the case of those who do not have financial means to sustain themselves, as previously explained. When there is no room for the applicant in SPRAR centres, he/she is authorised to remain at the CARA.

There are also applicants who are detained in the Identification and Expulsion Centres (CIEs). The detention is addressed to applicants who have been

sentenced in Italy for a crime which envisages mandatory arrest in flagrancy, that is, for crimes involving drugs, sexual liberty and the favouring of illegal immigration and crimes involving prostitution or minors' exploitation. The applicant is thus subject to an expulsion or rejection order (Integrazione Migranti, 2018d).

Beneficiaries of international protection are issued a five-year residence permit. Humanitarian protection holders, on the other hand, are granted residence permits that last for up to two years (Asylum Information Database, 2015). Both subsidiary protection and humanitarian residence permits are renewed after the verification that the conditions that ruled their issuing remain. Also, family members of international protection holders who are not eligible to apply for international protection for themselves can request a residence permit for family reasons and, if granted the permit, they have the same rights of the relative who has the status. International protection holders have the right for family joining without the needing to match income and lodging requisites that are required for other migrants – such as economic migrants, for example.

Refugees, subsidiary and humanitarian protection beneficiaries have the right to travel and establish themselves throughout the whole Italian territory, as well as the right to work in the country. They can also circulate throughout the Schengen area without the need for a visa during a maximum period of three months. According to the Geneva Convention, international protection holders can be issued a travel document to travel to non-EU countries in case they cannot obtain a passport with their countries' of origin embassies and consulates – what happens more than often.

The international protection beneficiaries are supposed to be provided with the same public services available to Italian citizens, such as lodging, welfare services, education and employment.

Beneficiaries of international and humanitarian protection can apply for permanent residence permits after five years living in Italy if they match specific criteria. This document enables them to access the whole of EU's labour market according to the rules of each Member State. International protection holders who have been granted refugee status are eligible to apply for Italian naturalization after legally residing in Italy for five years. Subsidiary and humanitarian protection beneficiaries must wait ten years until they are allowed to do the same (Integrazione Migranti, 2018b).

### III.1. The right to study

The Italian legislation on the right to study for immigrants provides that all children under 16 years old must take part in the national education system, even if they are in an irregular situation. However, there are some schools that are reluctant to enrol a high number of foreign students. On top of that, there is a shortage of places available in schools located in remote areas around the accommodation centres for asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection (Asylum Information Database, 2018).

Concerning 16-year-old immigrants and over, the Italian law determines that adults who hold refugee status or subsidiary protection status have the right to access the education system and further training within the limits and in the ways established for foreigners legally residing in Italy (Gazzeta Ufficiale, 2014). The Consolidation Act on Immigration (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1998) allows the access to university for beneficiaries of international protection in the same conditions offered to Italian students.

However, the current law is about to change. The populist government of Matteo Salvini, Minister of Internal Affairs, presented a decree proposal – the so-called anti-migrant decree – which was approved by the Italian Senate on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018. If the lower house of the parliament also approves the new decree, humanitarian protection residency permits are going to be abolished. As a consequence, when asylum-seekers are not entitled to refugee or subsidiary protection status, much stricter rules will govern the issuing of a “special protection” residency permit for those who are eligible. This status

may last for six months or one year – instead of the two-year protection guaranteed by the currently valid humanitarian protection status.

“Of the 81,500 decisions handed down by Italian authorities in 2017, eight per cent were granted asylum, eight per cent subsidiary protection and a quarter humanitarian protection” (AFP, 2018). That means that immigrants who are in the same situation as those who received humanitarian protection are likely to be neglected not only regarding education but also basic human needs.

The Università degli Studi di Trento in the autonomous region of Trento found a way to work-around the issue of enrolment of students who have not yet been given a decision regarding their asylum claim. At this institution, asylum-seekers can start their studies before being or not being granted international protection status. This possibility came after the university signed an agreement with the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Cinformi (Immigration Information Centre). Trento and Bolzano are the only Italian provinces that are not subject to regional power, and are called autonomous because they have legislative powers. The other Italian provinces are subject to the procedures imposed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, that suggests that asylum-seekers might have access to vocational training courses but not to long courses such as undergraduate, masters and PhDs (CIR, AICCRE & Europe Consulting, 2010). The provision of this possibility for asylum-seekers to enrol in university courses is essential so that more candidates would be able to access Italian higher education without depending on the development of the bureaucratic procedures that governs the asylum concession.

### III.2. CIMEA: the recognition of previous studies

Article 26 of the Italian legislation on immigration determines the following:

3. The provisions concerning the recognition of diplomas, certificates and other foreign qualifications for Italian citizens are applied to the holders of refugee or subsidiary protection status.

3-bis. For the recognition of professional qualifications, diplomas, certificates and other qualifications obtained abroad by refugee status holders or subsidiary



protection status, competent administrations shall identify appropriate assessment, validation and accreditation systems that allow recognition of titles pursuant to Article 49 of the Presidential Decree of 31 August 1999, n. 394, even in the absence of certification by the State in which the certificate was obtained, where the person concerned proves that he cannot acquire the certification. (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1998)

The European guideline for the recognition of degrees of third-country nationals is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). The LRC establishes useful instruments and structures for the recognition of foreign qualifications and periods of studies abroad. Under its Section VII, Article VII in regards to the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, it states that:

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence. (Council of Europe, 1997, p. 9)

However, a 2016 report (Council of Europe & United Nations, 2016) of the LRC Committee monitoring the implementation of the convention concluded that 70% of the countries who signed the LRC had not put in practice Article VII. Therefore, those countries have no regulations at any level concerning the recognition of refugees' and displaced persons' qualifications.

In Italy, the criteria and procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications are not regulated at a national or sub-national level, but by the universities themselves, who have full decision-making authority and total autonomy to set up their own rules.

The national ENIC-NARIC<sup>11</sup> office in Italy, called CIMEA (Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence), works along with the CRUI (Conference of Italian Rectors) overseeing the implementation of the LRC. The two entities are in charge of indicating different criteria and instruments in order to ensure LRC's effectiveness within the country by providing training courses on recognition issues, national seminars, etc.

Higher Education Institutions are obliged to establish and list academic recognition procedures within their Institutional Teaching Regulations and publish those procedures on their websites. The Ministry of Education, University and Research oversees each set of *Institutional Teaching Regulations*. (Council of Europe & United Nations, 2016)

Italy currently has two active services addressed to support the recognition of qualifications for refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries – apart from those led by the academic institutions themselves.

The first is conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who provides a “Declaration of value” for individuals entitled to international protection.

A Declaration of value (*Dichiarazione di valore in loco*) is an official document, written in Italian, which certifies the authenticity and legitimacy of the documentation presented, issued by Italian diplomatic representation offices to people who have been awarded an academic qualification by a foreign educational establishment and intend to pursue their studies in Italy or initiate an academic qualification equivalence or professional recognition procedure.

The information provided in the DV includes the legal status and nature of establishment issuing the academic qualification; the value of the qualification in the country where it was issued for educational, academic and/or professional purposes; the requirements for access to the course of study that ended with this qualification; the legal

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<sup>11</sup> ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region; NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union.

duration of the course itself, and any other information considered useful for its evaluation in Italy. (Farnesina, 2018)

On its website, the Ministry of Internal Affairs clarifies that such “Declaration of value” is not the recognition of qualifications itself. Instead, it is a document that intends to describe the value of the academic qualifications of refugees and holders of subsidiary protection in their countries of origin.

Another active service in Italy that aims to support the recognition of qualifications for foreigners is held by CIMEA itself, who processes "Certificates of comparability of foreign qualifications", both in regard to final school qualifications for entry to university as for university degrees for the continuation of studies. The issuing of this certificate is free of charge for international protection holders. The document contains general information related to the foreign school qualification/university degree, such as the recognition/accreditation of the issuing institution. The level of the qualification is also determined by the Bologna Process and the European Qualifications Framework, in addition to the indication of the nature of the course (academic or professional). Such document does not establish the formal recognition of the foreign title within the Italian system, but is a useful tool for the Italian institutions to evaluate the qualifications of immigrants during the recognition procedure (CIMEA, 2018a).

Between June 2016 and March 2018 the HEI that took the initiative to validate the qualifications obtained by international protection holders in their countries of origin could count on a “Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation”. This was an Erasmus+ project that involved six countries and its respective ENIC-NARIC offices: CIMEA (Italy), UK NARIC (United Kingdom), EP-NUFFIC (the Netherlands), CIEP (France), KMK (Germany) and ArmENIC (Armenia). It aimed at providing a guideline concerning practices and developing methodologies on this matter in order to facilitate the recognition process for the universities and to make it as smooth as possible for both international protection holders and HEIs. The main project activities were:

- Developing refugee country briefings on the educational systems of the five most important refugee countries – Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya and Syria
- Establishing common guidelines for recognition procedures for refugees, displaced persons and persons in

a refugee-like situation, including persons who do not have official documentation of their educational qualifications

- Establishing procedures, including the development of essential document templates and tools
- Establishing a common format for statements to be used in this type of recognition
- Testing the toolkit of common procedures and guidelines developed in the project in all six participating countries
- Developing e-Learning modules for ENIC-NARIC and higher education staff (NOKUT, 2016)

Following this pilot project, Erasmus+ launched “REACT – Refugees and Recognition”, a new project that aims to further and improve the successful practices of the toolkit “enhancing the mobility, employability and access to further studies for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation – including those without official documentation of their educational background” (NOKUT, 2018). The countries and ENIC-NARIC offices who are taking part in this further step are Italy (CIMEA), The Netherlands (NUFFIC), Germany (KMK) and Ireland (QQI). The second phase of investments funded by Erasmus+ to recognise the qualifications of international protection holders relied on the following activities:

- Testing and adaptation of the toolkit developed in the previous project, in close cooperation with higher education institutions
- Provide recommendations to higher education institutions and identifying best practice cases that illustrate pathways for admission of refugee students to further studies
- Developing five refugee country briefings
- Developing e-learning modules based on the refugee country briefings (NOKUT, 2018)

Finally, CIMEA has its own recognition programme designed for the evaluation and accreditation of the previously acquired academic skills of international protection holders. The *Attivazione del Coordinamento Nazionale sulla Valutazione delle Qualifiche dei Rifugiati*<sup>12</sup> (CNVQR) was created after various requests from Italian HEIs that wanted

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<sup>12</sup> Activation of the National Coordination on the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications.

help and guidance on the recognition of refugees' qualifications. With the increasing number of immigrants in emergency situations arriving in Italy, the demand for this aid has also increased, and CIMEA has decided to activate this programme on its own independent initiative. The CNVQR is configured as an informal network of experts that works within HEIs and deals with the recognition of qualifications. They strive to share assessment practices, handle problematic cases and to provide information and guidance on the relevant methodological strategies for an accurate evaluation of qualifications held by refugees, even in the absence or with poor documentation from the origin countries (CIMEA, 2018b).

### III.3. Scholarships

Among the categories of scholarships available for beneficiaries of international protection in Italy, one can find the Ministero dell'Interno along with the Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane<sup>13</sup> (CRUI), as well as the Agenzia per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario<sup>14</sup> (ADISU). Universities can also be providers of scholarships, either funded by private entities or by their own funds (when there are interest and possibility of the rector to direct a part of the institution's annual budget for this purpose). On average, the scholarships funded by the Ministero dell'Interno/CRUI and ADISU are worth 4,800.00 € per year per student.

The scholarships provided by the Ministero dell'Interno with the CRUI are available for the students only as services – that is, students do not receive any cash<sup>15</sup>. In the case of ADISU scholarships, part of the amount is transferred directly to the students' accounts. Some prefer this type of aid because it gives them greater autonomy to manage their expenses. As for the scholarships awarded by the HEIs with their own funds, it is up to institutions to decide if the students will receive cash, services, or both.

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<sup>13</sup> The Conference of Italian University Rectors

<sup>14</sup> Agency for the Right to University Studies

<sup>15</sup> There is an exception for this rule during summer time, when the university is closed. In this period, the students do not have access to the universities' restaurants and cafeterias. Thus, in August they receive some cash for food.

Students who receive the scholarship in services usually have access to housing in university residences. They also receive a credit for meals in the institutions' canteens. However, without pocket money, they cannot afford to buy basic products or do simple everyday things like mobile phone top-ups. In the case of the scholarships funded by the Ministero dell'Interno with CRUI and ADISU, the transportation costs are not covered. Some of the students interviewed in the scope of this research also reported that the books required for their studies are more than often not available in the universities' libraries, and so they struggle to buy them. For these reasons, those who receive scholarships exclusively in the form of services have no choice but to work besides studying in order to make ends meet.

The students who were awarded scholarships provided by the academic institutions – either funded by the HEIs or by private institutions – are sometimes in a somewhat comfortable position to expose their concerns to the university and discuss the possibilities of using the funds available to meet their needs. The non-involvement of large governmental bodies might facilitate the dialogue between scholarship awarding institutions and scholarship holders in this case.

In the academic year of 2016/2017, when the Ministero dell'Interno launched their scholarships in cooperation with the CRUI, there were 120 scholarships available for international protection holders who wanted to (re)start their undergraduate, master or PhD studies. The Pontificia Università Lateranense (Pontifical Lateran University) was also involved in this project, since 20 of those 120 scholarships were destined exclusively for students who wished to study in this university. In that year there were 236 candidates for this category of scholarship. Among the total applicants, only 57 met the requirements and were awarded scholarships (Ministero dell'Interno, 2017). The hardest requirement to be met is to have international protection status. Not having it already excludes a candidate, no matter how prepared and capable one is to start the academic studies in Italy.

The applicants, according to the countries of origin and the grants awarded can be found in the table below [Table 3]:

Table 3. Granted scholarships by country of origin

Country	Applicants		Grants	
Pakistan	68	28,81%	18	31,58%
Syria	36	15,25%	8	14,04%
Afghanistan	25	10,59%	8	14,04%
Nigeria	12	5,08%	2	3,51%
Palestine	10	4,24%	1	1,75%
Somalia	10	4,24%	2	3,51%
Iraq	8	3,39%	3	5,26%
Cameroon	6	2,54%	2	3,51%
Eritrea	6	2,54%	4	7,02%
Iran	4	1,69%	1	1,75%
The Gambia	3	1,27%	3	5,26%
Mali	3	1,27%	1	1,75%
Ethiopia	2	0,85%	1	1,75%
Togo	2	0,85%	1	1,75%
Turkey	1	0,42%	1	1,75%
Yemen	1	0,42%	1	1,75%
Others	39	16,53%	0	0%
Total	236		57	

Source: Adapted from

[http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/ppt\\_seminario\\_definitivo.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/ppt_seminario_definitivo.pdf).

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Out of 236 candidates, only 35 were women, and only four were granted the scholarship. The countries of origin of those who were awarded the scholarships were Cameroon, Eritrea, Syria and Yemen.

The applicants chose to apply for five main courses: Engineering, Economy, Business Management, Computer Technology and Telecommunications. Among those who were granted the scholarships though, the courses that prevailed were Engineering, Economy, Computer Technology, Finance, Languages, Political Science and Social Sciences.

The HEI that enrolled students with this scholarship were the following:

- Pontificia Università Lateranense
- Politecnico di Bari
- Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro
- Università degli Studi della Basilicata

- Università degli Studi di Catania
- Università degli Studi di Ferrara
- Università degli Studi di Genova
- Università degli Studi de L'Aquila
- Università degli Studi di Messina
- Università degli Studi di Milano
- Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM di Milano
- Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
- Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale
- Università degli Studi di Pisa
- Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza
- Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata
- Università degli Studi Roma Tre
- Università degli Studi di Sassari
- Università degli Studi di Siena
- Università degli Studi di Torino
- Università degli Studi di Trento
- Università degli Studi di Trieste
- Università degli Studi Ca' Foscari Venezia
- Università degli Studi di Verona

Many of those HEIs figure among the best in the country, and some are even in the ranking of best universities of the world, according to Times Higher Education, such as the Sapienza University in Rome and the University of Trento, both among the best 300 universities of the world (Times Higher Education, 2018).

#### III.4. Learning Italian

Learning the Italian language is perceived by all of the students interviewed as one of the first and most essential measures when arriving in the country. This is a priority not only for them to achieve a status of autonomous human beings once they are living in the country, but it is also essential to integrate into the labour market and access university if they wish. During the time I was in Italy for this research, I felt the need to learn Italian



too. I was expecting the people on the streets and the staff of the universities to talk to me in English, since this is a common practice in most western European countries. I did not assume that everybody would speak English, but I expected more people to do it.

I was living in a town in the region of Puglia, southern Italy, with approximately 100,000 people. In this town, not many people speak other languages than Italian. It is indeed tough to communicate without having a reasonable knowledge of the language. There are basic matters to be handled in Italian such as talking to landlords to find a place to live, or to government officers in the police headquarters to ask for a residence permit, or to civil servants in the town hall to report a change of address<sup>16</sup>.

Those language barriers are hard to overcome without proper support, and through them, I could experience a small sample of what asylum-seekers face when arriving in Italy. Language is one of the toughest invisible barriers of immigrating. English is not commonly spoken in Italian universities either. There were people from the staff of the academic institutions who spoke English, but many others did not, and I needed to talk to all of them.

Undoubtedly, my communication difficulties were not as huge as that of Arab or Bangla speakers, for example, since my mother tongue is Portuguese, a neo-Latin language with the same roots as Italian. However, I realised I needed to study the language, and a good way of doing it would be to ask for support in the same place that asylum-seekers do. The city where I was living hosted a significant share of asylum-seekers and other categories of immigrants who arrived in Italy from the Middle-East, Africa and Asia. For this reason, there was a language course offered for foreigners of all backgrounds by public authorities.

For those who had to apply for the residence permit, attending this course was mandatory, and they had to be approved in the mid-term and final tests of the Italian language school in order to get the certificate and increase their chances of obtaining such permit. Anyone could enrol after providing an address and fiscal number<sup>17</sup>. There is a 10.00 € fee to be paid by the student in any post office before starting the course (asylum-

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<sup>16</sup> All residents in Italy must register their addresses in the town hall of the city where they are living and wait for the visit of the *vigile*, an officer who goes into peoples' homes to verify if they are living in decent conditions.

<sup>17</sup> Every resident in Italy receive a fiscal number when applying for a residence permit.

seekers are exempt from paying for that). There are several classes starting throughout the year for the basic levels of Italian language – A1 and A2, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

The teacher who was in charge of the registration of the students did not speak English, but he had a good level of Spanish and French. He was also very friendly and tried his best to understand the needs of the students even if they could not communicate in any of the languages that he mastered. In the first week of classes, the students were taught the Roman alphabet.

The main didactic material used in the course was a textbook called “Italiano di Base – Corso per Studenti Migranti”. The material had good quality and was provided for free for asylum-seekers. Given that not all of the students were asylum-seekers and most of the immigrants who attended these classes were still looking for jobs and yet in a vulnerable economic situation, the school provided the handbook in digital format, so the students did not have to purchase it. I attended the two months of the course only following the book through my smartphone’s screen.

The teachers also made the material available in a photocopy store nearby the school, where the students could print it for a lower price. They could either print all the pages at once or a few pages per week, according to the pace of the course. This way they could pay for the material in instalments, what was a relief for many. Some were even in the position of asking the school to pay for their material if they could prove that they did not have the financial means to do so.

The lectures were given from Monday to Friday. The average number of students in the classes was 20, and there were five classes beginning in the bimester when I attended classes.

The course welcomed students of all ages, but most of them were young, between 16 and 29 years old. I attended the lectures in two different classes (on the first week I was assigned to the wrong class, and then I had to move). I benefitted from this mistake, since I had the chance to study in classes that sharply differed from each other in terms of the profile of the students and teachers’ attitudes.

The first class was mostly formed by men. There were just three women – a 25-year-old girl from Afghanistan, a middle-aged lady from Albania and I. All of the other

17 students were men from various countries: Somalia, Ethiopia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Senegal, Togo, Nigeria and Syria.

In the first class where I attended the course, the teacher was very patient, but she could not control the younger boys who had no discipline. They were very agitated and many seemed like they did not want to be there. Most were far from their families and out of formal education. They were looking for jobs and lived in smaller *paesi*<sup>18</sup> near from the town where the school was. Of course, not all of them were asylum-seekers, there were economic migrants among them as well.

Some students were very disciplined, while others arrived late every day and did not do the exercises asked by the teacher during the classes. Most of the time, the teacher was not able to demand discipline from the students. Even though she was a good teacher and had empathy, she could not catch their attention. A part of her inability to control the class was due to her cautious approach to the students. She was very careful not to cause even more psychological harms to them. She knew they were already going through a lot and that that was probably the reason why they could not concentrate.

One day this teacher explained the word *pigro* to us, which means “lazy” in Italian. The best way she found to do it was asking the students: *sei pigro?* (“are you lazy?”). When they did not know what to answer, because they did not know the word, she said: *“Non sei pigro. Una persona che viene dall’Africa alla ricerca di una vita migliore non è pigra. Quindi, pigro è l’ultima cosa che sei.”* (“You are not lazy. Someone who comes from Africa to pursue a better life is not lazy. Lazy is the last thing you are”). Even though she could not control the class, her approach towards them was always friendly and respectful.

I believe that providing psychological support for these students and mixing people of different ages, instead of putting a majority of young people together, could help to solve the indiscipline problem. At the end of the week, the students had not improved very much their ability to communicate in Italian, and a lot of them were attending the course for the second or third time already, without significant development.

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<sup>18</sup> Italian towns and villages.

Also, balancing the number of women and men proved to be very advantageous in the other class where I attended lectures.

In the other class, there were two teachers: one was in charge of the first part of the lecture and the other was responsible for the second part of it. The environment of this class was much more favourable for learning: there was a 50-50 proportion of male and female students, and there was also a mix of older and younger people. The cultural diversity was huge too. There were Indians, Senegalese, Congolese, Nigerians, an Iranian, a Syrian, a Guatemalan and a Bangla.

The two educators had very different methods of conducting the class and their characters and educational backgrounds were unlike. The one who was responsible for the first part of the classes was extremely patient and spoke in a fluid and steady way. She had already lived abroad in a place where the language and alphabet were entirely different from Italian, so she understood the difficulties of the students. Also, she spoke English, French and Spanish, what was extremely helpful, since many times the students did not understand the explanation of some complex vocabularies in Italian. In this case, she was able to do the translation to English – which some of them spoke – or French, which is an official language in a variety of African countries.

As for the teacher in charge of the second part of the class, she had no patience at all and bullied the students quite often. For instance, there were some reading and speaking exercises in the textbook that the students were required to do, and it was so tough for those who speak Arab or Farsi to pronounce Italian words correctly. When they tried to do it without success, the teacher started to scream at them in front of the whole class, what was embarrassing and humiliating for them. This teacher did not speak any language other than Italian, so she had no idea of how hard it is to learn another idiom. She was apparently unprepared to teach Italian to foreigners and always seemed to be rushing to the next exercise, even when the students were not understanding anything.

After analysing the difference of quality between the lectures of the two teachers, it is clear the importance of 1) preparing the educators to deal with immigrants – especially when the immigrants carry emotional burdens that have to be dealt with – and 2) shortlisting the teachers who are going to teach foreign students according to their backgrounds, that is, if they speak other languages that could help on the students learning

process, or if they have travelled abroad and experienced the difficulties of doing everyday tasks without mastering a country's idiom.

I personally believe that having a teacher who empathises with the foreigners' difficulties to learn a new language is beneficial, so the educator will choose the right teaching approach and provide more efficient methods of learning to the students. All three teachers with whom I had classes seemed genuinely interested in the cultures of the countries of origin where the students came from. This is a really positive aspect, since the students also seemed more engaged in the debates when they were talking about how were their lives before arriving in Italy. It is important to encourage this exchange of information in the classes and value the cultural capital that those students have to share.

Overall, the students did not seem to speak Italian at the A2 level when finishing the course. The teachers, both "good" and "bad" ones, did their best to help them prepare for the type of exercises they would have to perform in the test. Those exams were supervised by the teachers themselves on the last day of classes. Attending those public Italian language courses, immigrants strengthen their relation with the culture of the hosting country, what is of the utmost importance. However the fact that they do not have the expected level of Italian language by the end of the course is something that must be considered by the government. A better quality course is vital so the immigrants will not suffer the consequences and stress of not obtaining their residence permit or the pressure of having to repeat the course many times.

## **IV. Case study**

### **IV.1. Universities**

Six universities supported this study by allowing their staff members – professors and coordinators – to give interviews or answering a questionnaire. The institutions were: Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, Università degli Studi di Ferrara, Università degli Studi di Pavia, Università Telematica Uninettuno, Università del Salento and Università degli Studi di Trento.

Besides the collaboration of the universities above, I have carried out extensive online research that enabled the conception of a list of initiatives from other Italian

universities that are welcoming refugees as well. All the projects I had the chance to know and gather information about are listed and explained in the following subchapters.

#### IV.1.a. Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro

The Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro conceived a project to validate the competencies of immigrants called Centre for Lifelong Learning (C.A.P.). Among the people engaged in this initiative, one can find foreign tutors – some of them students of the university– who use their own diaspora networks to recruit potential beneficiaries for the services offered by the C.A.P.

The international protection beneficiaries must present documentation of their status to be granted a scholarship at the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, but there are also opportunities for those who have not yet obtained the international protection status. The latter can use some services offered by the institution, such as the assessment of soft skills, available to both EU and non-EU citizens – a facility that was open from 2012 to 2017<sup>19</sup>.

The C.A.P. is an AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) project. The AMIF is an EU funding programme that supports the management of migratory flows (European Commission, 2014). The C.A.P. benefits from this funding to arrange and provide the assessment and validation of the refugees' soft skills. The stage of the certification of skills started in 2014, and in 2016 all the work was completed. The scholarships' programme started in the academic year of 2016/2017. From 2017 onwards, the service addressed scholarships only for those who have refugee or subsidiary protection status.

The scholarships for international protection beneficiaries at Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro are repaid by the Ministero dell'Interno. It offers exemption from university fees, services to the students – such as books, educational materials, etc. – and they can access all of the university services (e.g. libraries and sports services). The

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<sup>19</sup> The service was suspended in April of 2018 because the University was waiting for its financial plan to be approved. The institution wrote a new project to require resources and reopen the service.

university also gives the beneficiaries the possibility to be tutored through the C.A.P., that is, the professionals working on the project guide and assist them.

Professor Fausta Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018), president of the C.A.P, explained that it is becoming more challenging to provide one-on-one tutoring to each of the students, since the number of enrolled international protection holders has increased. As for the profile of the refugee students that the university receives, most of them already speak Italian when they arrive at the institution. It takes months or years for them to obtain international protection status, thus they learn Italian in the meantime. Therefore, when they reach the university they already have good linguistic levels.

For those who do not speak Italian it is offered the possibility to attend the language course. Through the C.A.P. they have the opportunity to start free courses – there is just a € 10.00 fee they have to pay in order to enrol. Those free courses are organized by another centre, which has an agreement with the C.A.P. specifically for the Italian language course. Depending on the language knowledge they have, they start the course as beginners or upper-level students.

The refugees who reach the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro are people who had already learnt a lot from life due to the situations they have been through. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) says they are already trained and even ahead of the native students when they arrive at the university. Usually, asylum-seekers who have just arrived in Italy do not go to universities because they have to sort out several things.

Unfortunately, only a small part of refugees make it to the university. The C.A.P.'s initial plan aimed at recognizing the degrees that refugees already possessed (obtained in their home countries). Many of the international protection beneficiaries in Italy who (re)accessed higher education had to start their academic courses from scratch, even if they already had academic and professional experience. Provided with an international database, the C.A.P. began to evaluate the qualifications already held by them. Therefore, it was created a network of information among beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers. The students who arrived in the first year of the reception were already graduated in their countries, so their request was to be able to continue the course of their studies in Italy, not to restart it.

The C.A.P. has also developed a method to turn professional experiences into academic credits by following a model of accreditation called QF (Qualifications Framework), created to certify educational credentials and evaluate the experiences in informal education. The team counts with a psychologist who manages this system along with certification experts. While the university welcomes international protection holders, the C.A.P. engages in the validation of their soft skills and the assessment of learning skills. Their formal skills, such as academic qualifications and professional experience, are also validated. This work is done in partnership with the local governments of the regions, since they are responsible for the recognition of the careers. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) points to the fact that the requests made by refugees to use the C.A.P.'s services are many, but the project lacks the staff to work on it.

The value of the financial awards for the students who were granted scholarships is 4,800 euros per year plus exemption of university fees. They must complete 20 credits every academic year to renew their scholarships. In the academic year of 2016/2017, only one student could not make it to the following year. The university foresees more cases of unsuccess in 2018 though. The new students (who enrolled in the 2017/2018 academic year) were not seniors or professionals, they were still in their first academic experience and university life was causing a harsher impact on them. According to Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018), the C.A.P. tries to bear those students, but they still face many difficulties, and keeping the scholarship is not an easy task.

The scholarship provides food and accommodation, which can be either in the university residence or in a private residence – in the latter case, the money of the rent is reimbursed to the students by the university. The international protection holders are very few compared to the number of migrants. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) says that “society might have the conviction that the barbaric invasion is coming, but this could not be farther from the truth”. She perceives sheltering refugees as a duty, since those who obtain international protection are the few who resist the procedure of seeking asylum. Therefore, universities are not being invaded by refugees. “There are so many economic immigrants, but only a small number of them have access to these opportunities. Having the status of international protection is not easy. So, when



we look at students with the protection status we support them because they are scarce” (Scardigno, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

The Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro accepted all applicants who fulfilled the minimum requirements for the scholarships. In the second year of the selection for the grant (2017/2018), two students did not go on with their applications and another five were excluded because they did not fulfil the requirements – being the protection status the most important criterion. Most of them already had academic backgrounds that could be recognised, so they did not have to start the course from the very beginning. The C.A.P. got to know all the previous activities they had done and then helped them to complete the request for the scholarship. However, they must do this request in person, so five candidates were not granted the aid.

The C.A.P. works with CIMEA on the recognition of credentials. CIMEA verifies if the qualifications that the prospect students have are equivalent to the university’s degree (the Italian diploma), then they send the certificate to the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, who contacts the students to say that they can apply for the scholarship. Before applying they must hold CIMEA’s certificate recognizing their qualifications. This certificate is issued for free for refugees and subsidiary protection holders but must be paid by beneficiaries of humanitarian protection. Some do not have the financial means to pay for it, but most of them endeavour to have it in order to obtain the CRUI scholarship. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) explains that CIMEA is really important because without it the university would not be able to make the students’ curricula equivalence.

Professor Giancarla Stama, who coordinates C.A.P.’s activities with Professor Scardigno, is in charge of contacting CIMEA for the recognition of the qualifications of international protection holders. She explains that refugees do not have the opportunity to go to the embassy of their countries to request the validation of their documents, which is requested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to complete their enrolment.

Many students have obtained the recognition of their diploma thanks to CIMEA. Some obtained the full equivalence, that is, full recognition of the degree, or the recognition of some subjects attended previously to enrol in our university. In this way they are able to start the course from a certain point already, not from the very beginning. Most of

these students are able to abbreviate their courses through the recognition of two or three of the subjects they attended previously. This recognition enables the acceleration of their studies. (Stama, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

The dissemination of information on the scholarships' call for applications was done through the website of the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro, which contained all the information and documents regarding the calls published by the Ministero dell'Interno in Italian and English. The international protection holders who are enrolled at the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro have often stayed in CARA for a while, which is the reception centre for asylum-seekers. CARA centres are the first point of reception, and also where students who are interested to enrol in the university are found. The university has a network with CARA, so its director forwards the prospective students to the C.A.P. Subsequently, the university starts the procedure to enrol these students.

The students usually apply for the Ministero dell'Interno/CRUI scholarships in July, and the ranking with the names of those who were granted the aid is published in September. However, the money arrives at the university's account only in December, creating a problematic time gap. To provide the students with housing, the university must commit to the ADISU, who manages the university accommodations. The students who were granted scholarships must be accommodated from October onwards, but the HEI is only able to pay for it when the money arrives in December. The students also ask for the books and the institution orders them.

We end up losing a lot of time during this gap, since the C.A.P. has no funds to anticipate. We have two years of experience dealing with this matter. In face of this situation, the students are only able to have accommodation from October onwards because we are committed with ADISU, that opens this exception for us [of postponing the housing payment] (Stama, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

Concerning the books, students have the option to study in libraries. ADISU can also lend the books for them for up to three months. Besides that, students can eat at the university canteen even if the university has not yet received the money from the scholarships, because the institution pays for what the students have consumed. In 2018,

the university was able to give the students a pass for the *Ipercoop*, a supermarket where they can buy groceries and primary need products, such as clothes or even tablets to study.

The C.A.P. has signed an agreement with the University of Messina, that has a centre called CEMI (Centre for Migration, Social Integration and Intercultural Communication) which has the same objectives of the C.A.P. and based its initiative on C.A.P.'s guidelines (Università degli Studi di Messina, 2018). Thus, if there is a student who wants to study in Sicily, this person can seek the same service that Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro offers, but at the University of Messina. It is an expansion of this kind of services in Italy.

Much of the success of Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro's initiative is due to the goodwill of the staff. The professors did not receive any sort of training to teach and support beneficiaries of international protection, they paid for it instead. These educators attended courses with CIMEA and the CRUI to learn how to do the recognition of the educational qualifications and credentials of refugees. Further, the labour psychologist from the university is continuously on training to adapt the certification procedures to the needs of the refugees.

The staff of the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro keeps tutoring the students to try to figure out what are their main difficulties. There were few cases in which the students have not cooperated. Two of them refused to learn Italian, even though they have been living in Italy for years. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) emphasises that this is not the right attitude for integration and the university tends to be very strict about this. In the 2017/2018 academic year, the professors had helped the two students who refuse to learn Italian allowing them to do their exams in English, but the university reinforces that they must attend the Italian language course and start speaking and writing in Italian if they want to further progress in their education. Learning the language is perceived by the academic institution as a priority. The Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro have some English-taught courses – e.g. Masters in economics – but most of them are taught in Italian. The students are free to choose whatever course they want within the institution.

In 2016/2017, eight students enrolled at the university with the CRUI/Ministero dell'Interno's scholarship. In 2017/2018 there were other eight in the same condition. Most of them chose to study languages or political science, even though they had previous

degrees in other areas obtained in their countries of origin, such as biology or chemistry. The students changed their field of studies because they were not able to have their credentials recognised. Furthermore, studying these subjects in Italian would be very difficult for them, and so they preferred to enrol in a new faculty – of languages or political science – which allowed them to carry out the work of a linguistic mediator in the reception centres where they have lived previously. The possibility of changing their academic paths is a rather viable way of building a career in Italy. Thus, some of these students gave up their original studies to adapt and face less severe situations.

In 2016/2017, almost all the students achieved the 20 credits required to obtain the renewal of the scholarship for the following year. At the beginning of 2017/2018, the professors at Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro had the impression that they were facing more difficulties to achieve it though. The university staff had a hard time understanding their primary areas of struggling – whether if they were linguistic or even relational difficulties. In the second semester of 2017/2018 academic year, almost all of them were responding satisfactorily to the courses.

Regarding the students who will not be able to make it from the first to the second academic year, if any, the consequences are still uncertain. In the worst case scenario, those students would have their studies permanently interrupted in Italy, without chances to rejoin Higher Education. However, positive outcomes could flourish from the possibility of returning to this same programme at a better time or having the possibility to apply for other initiatives.

The situation at the university is favourable though. Many students have been able to integrate by creating an association for foreign students, others are already working as linguistic mediators. The HEI's aim now is to identify the most complicated cases and avoid that these students give a step back, what would be very frustrating for them and could mean their return to high school or more difficult incorporation into the job market.

The most significant challenge faced by the university regarding the integration of the refugee students is to recognise their cultural capital. The society is not predisposed to think that refugees can be an asset. It is a huge challenge to make people understand that it is beneficial for the university to welcome them.

It is vital for the HEIs to have the full support of their rectors to develop their refugee programmes. In the case of the Università degli Studi di Bari, further than the

administrative component that must continue (i.e. the management of the scholarship), there is also the need to make the community think about the welcoming of refugees in a non-problematic and positive way, and that is the biggest challenge. The university expects the Italian students to get to know the heritage of the international students, so they will enrich their social and cultural capitals, have a better understanding of global matters and help to preserve a heritage that should never be lost.

The conditions under which the beneficiaries of international protection from Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro live, such as food and housing, are somehow controlled by the university. The students can complain to the office of the C.A.P. and also to the institution's foreign office if they have any problems. From 2017, the students have a card with which they can buy food and essential need items as a result of their revindications for it. Professor Scardigno (personal communication, April 23, 2018) says they are very good at manifesting problems, and they have even been able to form an association to organise themselves. Some of the students participate in the association while others have more specific needs and do not want to be a part of it.

The primary expectation of the university regarding the future of the students who hold international protection is that they return the investment of the university on them by sharing their cultural capital with the society, mainly with the Italian students. The institution expects a truly intercultural exchange.

We have the expectation that there will be an exchange and that the public opinion in regard to the presence of refugees will change over time. There are so many prejudices and this is the only way we can change this situation, that is, showing that they [the refugees] are wonderful and that if we help them, they can be a tremendous asset to our society. (Scardigno, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

The university's goal is to try to enhance both the academic and professional experiences of the students who hold international protection, besides improving human skills. The institution believes that refugees are people that make decisions and take causes into their own hands. Refugee students have a rich social capital to share. For instance, one of the pupils is a Palestinian man who tutors incoming students from Senegal and Kenya. He graduated in Russia, worked in Greece and Norway, and today he is a mediator

for the IOM. The fact that he is now tutoring international students from Africa<sup>20</sup> is an example of the benefit that he, as a refugee student, brings to the society.

Under the Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro's point of view, the most valuable aspect of this experience is to create an environment of mutual learning and exchange among the pupils. The C.A.P.'s mission is not to assimilate the foreigners to the Italian or European cultures, but to create a cultural exchange between refugees and the community.

#### IV.1.b. Università degli Studi di Ferrara

The Università degli Studi di Ferrara allows asylum-seekers, refugees, subsidiary and humanitarian protection holders to apply for the courses available at the institution's faculties. Professor Matteo Vincenzo d'Alfonso, Vice-Rector for Internationalisation, answered the University Staff Questionnaire [Annex 2] on June 16, 2018, in which he clarified the university's services regarding the welcoming of asylum-seekers and international protection holders.

This HEI offers scholarships both for beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers. The grant covers the university's tuition fees, as well as housing for the students. The value of the financial award is almost twice of that offered by the CRUI/Ministero dell'Interno and ADISU scholarships: 8000€ per year. Such grant is given to the students as services and also as money in hands. The Università degli Studi di Ferrara has been granting scholarships for international protection holders and asylum-seekers since 2016 and takes responsibility on financing those scholarships.

The award has been given to one student on the academic year of 2016/2017 and for two other students in 2017/2018. Their countries of origin are Syria, Afghanistan and Gambia. Two of them were attending undergraduate courses in Languages and one attended a master's in Economics. The criteria to select eligible students among all of the beneficiaries of international protection who have shown interest to apply for the scholarships was based on the analysis of their study records, letters of motivation and interview with staff members. One of the students who applied was rejected for not

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<sup>20</sup> International students with student visas, that is, not international protection holders.

meeting the status requirements. Students may apply while they are seeking asylum, but they must have international protection at the moment of enrolment.

S6, for instance, applied when she did not have refugee status yet, but she was able to enrol because at the time of enrolment she had already been granted asylum – even though her residence permit had not yet been issued. The institutions, organizations and professionals involved in the selection procedure are three faculty members, a professional from *Medecins Sans Frontières* and a journalist from *Internazionale*.

The information regarding the opening of the application processes was disseminated among beneficiaries of international protection via newspapers, the university's website, mailing and social media, and also with the help of NGOs. The language used to spread this information was mainly Italian. The scholarship of the student admitted in the academic year of 2016/2017 was renewed for 2017/2018, and the requirements for that were the accomplishment of 12 ECTS.

The university offers courses both in Italian and English depending on the area of studies, and they all require the presence of the students in the classes. The professors have not received any training or orientation to teach and support the beneficiaries of international protection, and the moments of assessment of the students are not evaluated and supervised differently from the native students (e.g. their grade achievements, the time they need to adapt to the course due to the difficulties they may be facing, etc.).

In case beneficiaries of international protection have difficulties to follow the lessons, they receive tutoring from a dedicated professional. The university provides Italian language courses for the beneficiaries of international protection as well. Furthermore, the HEI itself is in charge of supervising the conditions under which the beneficiaries of international protection are living, such as food and housing.

The main goals and expectations of the university regarding the future of the beneficiaries of international protection is to provide them with the same chances as any other enrolled student, as prescribed by the Italian Constitution.

#### IV.1.c. Università degli Studi di Pavia

To apply for the scholarship at Università degli Studi di Pavia, candidates must have international protection status – either subsidiary protection or refugee status.

Professor Emanuela Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018), assistant of the Università degli Studi di Pavia's Refugee Project, explains that in the first year of the programme the scholarships were funded by different sponsors. The university itself financed some, others were funded by external institutions that share a part of the university's administration account – the board of the University. In the second year of the project, which started in the academic year of 2016/2017, the Fondazione Bracco – an important pharmaceutical company – offered to finance five positions to international protection holders.

The values of the financial awards provided in the first and second years were almost the same, and the programme does not give money in cash to the students. The scholarships include free enrolment to the university, free accommodation in the students' houses and free access to the canteen. In the first year of the programme (2015/2016), the HEI offered some part-time jobs for the students at the university itself – which are the same part-time jobs offered for Italian students as well – because the students who hold international protection suggested they needed some pocket money.

The whole scholarship package corresponds to an amount of approximately 7000€ per year per student. This value is almost the same that was requested to Fondazione Bracco to finance the scholarships in the second year of the programme. The difference was that the Fondazione Bracco was asked, since the beginning of their collaboration in the project, to provide some pocket money to the students due to the experience that the university had in the previous year. Therefore, the students of the first year of the project had to work to have some money, but the others whose scholarships were funded by Fondazione Bracco received an amount of cash since the beginning of their enrolment and did not have to work.

In the academic year 2017/2018, Università degli Studi di Pavia did not receive new students holding international protection. Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) explained that it occurred because the programme started with 15 students, and then five positions were added. Thus, the university had this “stock” of 20 students, what is actually a lot, since it is not easy for those students to pursue their careers.

They have some difficulties, so they need a lot of support, assistance. We have to wait for the first students of



this programme to graduate before receiving new students. If everything goes well, this year we will have our first two graduated students: one in July, in the bachelor of political sciences, and the other in September, in the Master of Informatics Engineering (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018).

Concerning the renewal of the scholarships from the first year to the following, until 2017 only two students decided to leave the project. One of them was a girl from Cameroon who stopped to attend the course. When trying to reach her, the University services were informed that she had moved to France, although they could never be sure of it. Another student decided to leave after one year, in September of 2017. He is Afghan and was attending the bachelor in Engineering. He decided to drop out because he wanted to start working to save money to live with his partner. In 2018 there were other three students leaving the project because they had not completed enough credits to remain enrolled. Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) points to the fact that the staff tried to support them by activating many support measures, but in the end, they were not able to accomplish the requirements, so the university asked them to leave the project. As for the other 16 students who remain in the project, Professor Dal Zotto affirms that they are performing well (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018).

Among the students who participated – or still participate – in the project, only three were women:

The first one, from Cameroon, left the project. The other one, who is also from Cameroon, is one of the students who is leaving the project now because she is not being able to reach any credits. Only one female student remains: she is from Somalia and she is enrolled in the bachelor in Political Studies (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018).

The project funded by Bracco Foundation initially aimed only on women who wished to build careers in sanitary professions such as nursing, medicine, etc. There were two problems that prevented the university from reaching this objective: (1) finding women refugees in Italy with high education degrees and (2) when they were found, they were not prepared enough to pass the entry exam which is necessary to enrol in this sort

of graduation in Italy. As a consequence, Bracco Foundation opened the funding offer also for male students in whatever course they wanted.

In regard to the criteria to select eligible students among all of the beneficiaries of international protection who have shown interest to apply for the university's programme in its first and second years, the university worked with SPRAR, asking for the collaboration of their central system to spread the information about the call for applications. Thus, the SPRAR units who had prospect students interested in continuing their studies sent their curricula to the university for the first year of enrolment. There were about 15 candidates, and the first selection was based on their motivation regarding the possibility of continuing the studies that they had started in their countries of origin.

Since the first year of the scholarships' offer started in January, the only courses open for applications were Political Sciences and Engineering, so the students had to be interested in one of those areas. They also needed to show a good level of Italian language, since the courses are taught in Italian. The only course taught in English is the Master's in Engineering, and for this one, it would be acceptable if the student could only speak English.

As for the selection, the university came to a number of approximately 20 candidates and decided who would receive the scholarships based on a colloquium with professors from different faculties. They analysed the titles obtained by the students in their countries of origin, but the students did not need to present their original documents. However, the students were required to demonstrate coherence when showing their knowledge.

For the second year, when the places were offered by Fondazione Bracco, the university received a lower number of applications: there were only ten applicants for five positions. That happened because, at the same time, the Ministero dell'Interno along with the CRUI opened the call for 100 scholarships, and the students who applied for the government's scholarship could decide to which university they wanted to go. Considering that the refugees were already living in a specific city or region, they might have preferred to stay where they were instead of applying for a scholarship in a university far away.

All of the Università degli Studi di Pavia courses require the presence of the students in the classes. There is only one online Italian language course – the Online

Language Support – which is managed by the Erasmus office. In this course, students learn the Italian language through a virtual platform, since beneficiaries of international protection arrive at the university with sufficient levels of Italian language, but need to improve their language skills. This platform is usually offered only for incoming Erasmus students, but it was adapted by the Erasmus+ project to provide some lessons designed only for refugees.

This HEI also provides psychological support for the students. As international protection holders, refugee students can access local health services. Therefore, one way to provide psychological support is to send them to local services, including mental health services. However, in more complex cases the university asked for the support of its own psychiatric. The Università degli Studi di Pavia has a medicine faculty where a psychiatric coordinates a group with specialists in ethnopsychiatry. Those specialists met the students, but Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) explains that at the moment this support was provided, many of the students seemed not to be convinced about the utility of this kind of support. “It is not easy. We had a lot of problems with adaptation, even now that we have been working together for three years”.

The professors at the university do not receive any sort of special training or orientation to teach and support international protection holders. In the beginning, the professors of the first year of the courses were informed about the enrolment of these students in their classes. The students were encouraged to talk to the professors, introduce themselves and establish direct relations. According to the students, a lot of different approaches were identified: some professors are really kind and open towards this project and try to support the students; others are not interested at all in who the students are, and they are not friendly with either refugee students or natives. This is also true for the administrative staff, since some employees really engaged in the project – they were happy with the initiative and happy to collaborate – whereas others totally disapproved of it.

Furthermore, the academic performance of international protection holders is not evaluated or supervised in a different way from the national students. The university does not want the status of refugee to make them different from the national or other international students. Apart from the case of the professors that personally decide to

provide individual support, the process of evaluation, texts and exams is precisely the same.

This is particularly important for the courses that require entry tests, like medicine. Students with the refugee status are considered by law as European students, so they have to do the entry test in Italian, not in English. We have, for example, an exclusive quota for international students in the nursing graduation, that is, there is a number of places reserved for them, and the test is in English. The refugees must do the test in Italian, so they are evaluated as Italian students. This is a tremendous difficulty because they miss a lot of years of study. They don't have this good level of Italian, and that is really tricky in this kind of test. There is a massive part of this test that concerns general culture, Italian culture, and they miss a lot of score in these matters (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication May 30, 2018).

The university oversees the living conditions of the students who benefit from refugee scholarships. Since they live at the university's apartments, there is the guarantee of the quality of their homes. The university has apartments for Italians and non-Italians who apply for aid due to low-income reasons. The historic building where they are allocated has a long tradition in town. Refugee students also benefit from meals at the university's canteen. Furthermore, the institution supports them to enrol in local health services, so all of them are registered with a doctor in Pavia.

One of the aims of the Refugee Programme at Università degli Studi di Pavia is to erase the division between refugees and other students, reaching a point in which all of them will be "only students", that is, some of them might have a particular legal status, but that is not supposed to be a label. Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) says there is still a long way to achieve this objective, since a lot of difficulties remain after three years of the programme's launching. Some of the students are about to obtain their degrees though, what is a really positive outcome.

It is a long way but I think we are in the right direction. Considering that we were the first [higher education institution] to start a refugee project in Italy, we didn't have any other institutions to compare our experiences with. Therefore, we might have made some mistakes, but we

acknowledged them and we were able to make the project continue in a better way (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018).

The integration challenge remains. Not necessarily the integration based on the students' status, but social integration into the students' community because the beneficiaries of international protection students are, in some cases, older than the other students.

Imagine, for example, a civil engineer who follows the course alone without speaking English very well. They often declare to feel loneliness, even because they move to our city from the reception project in which they had already started to build their social lives, and so they have to restart again (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018).

Moreover, the situation in their countries of origin is also a factor that influences a lot their performance. Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) gave an example of a student who achieved an excellent performance, but during his first year of studies, he had severe difficulties. He was worried about his mother, who was still in his country of origin and very ill. He left the project due to the hard time he had going through this situation. Fortunately, he was able to travel to visit his mother and then went back to Italy. When his mother passed away the period of grief was also very complicated, but the university supported him and encouraged him to stay in the project. After that, he achieved a good performance on studies and was fully able to follow his course.

There was another case of a student whose family was in Italy, but their welcoming period at the reception centre expired and they had to find a home and jobs for everyone. The student spoke Italian very well, so he interrupted his studies for some time to help his family, and then went back to university.

I think the situation they find themselves and also the impossibility for most of them to go back to their countries of origin if some relative passes away or something like that... I see this is really hard for them, and it influences the results, of course. Also, the income: some of them would like to work, to earn some money to send home, and sometimes they don't have it, because our scholarship provides services, not money. To have some money they must work, and there are some

difficulties related to it (Dal Zotto, Personal Communication, May 30, 2018)

Regarding the requirements that the beneficiaries of international protection must meet in order to renew their scholarships, the Università degli Studi di Pavia did not introduce a minimum number of credits to be reached by the students every year. There is only a number of credits that they are required to reach in three years, and if at the end of the normal duration of the graduation they have not reached this number of credits, they can ask for an additional year to finish their studies.

This system allows the students to gain some additional time, if they need, and to continue their studies after they overcome a problem. Professor Dal Zotto (Personal Communication, May 30, 2018) says that the first year of studies was lost for most of them. The refugee students face difficulties to understand the Italian university system and to recover what they studied in their countries of origin, since they had their careers interrupted for years. On top of those difficulties, there is the language barrier. Due to this combination of factors, four years might not be enough for them to complete their graduations. They need time.

#### IV.1.d. Università Telematica Uninettuno

The Università Telematica Uninettuno is an Italian University based in Rome. This HEI provides academic degree courses taught via distance learning. This means that the students are not required to attend the courses in presence, but rather with the help of technology. All of the programmes are conducted online through the e-learning platform. Uninettuno is one of the 11 distance-teaching universities in Italy who is accredited by the Italian Ministry of Higher Education. Professor Alessandro Caforio (Personal Communication, April 27, 2018), responsible for Innovation and Research, says that, so far, Uninettuno is the only distance-teaching university receiving a positive evaluation by the National Agency for the evaluation of the university and research system (Anvur).

Uninettuno provides programmes not only in Italian but also in English, Arabic, French, Russian, Chinese and Greek – being the first four the main languages of the institution's courses. The education system of Uninettuno comprises video-lectures recorded by professors from different countries. Each faculty chooses the professors based on their curricula and scientific excellence. They are invited to Uninettuno's studio

production centres where the video-lectures are recorded. Furthermore, there is another body of professors who support and provide exercises, live interaction and guidance to the students in both contents and live interaction activities.

Uninettuno started the scholarships' programme for immigrants in emergency situations looking for students who were entitled to international protection, either with refugee status or subsidiary protection status. The university funds most of the scholarships, and there are also some that are funded by the Cariplo Foundation (which belongs to the bank Intesa Sanpaolo). The call for scholarships funded by Cariplo was also open to asylum-seekers.

Professor Caforio (Personal Communication, April 27, 2018) explained that the Cariplo foundation scholarships were addressed only to refugees hosted in the region of Lombardia. Therefore, due to the geographical constraint that limited the potential population, an agreement between the university and the Cariplo foundation was reached to enable those scholarships to asylum seekers as well. Moreover, since Uninettuno is e-learn oriented, students can attend the classes from anywhere in the world, even if they are not allowed to remain in Italy. The only thing they have to do is log into the digital platform with their credential details.

The scholarships cover the costs of the full programmes, both bachelor and master degrees, including the access to the facilities called "technological poles". The first student who applied to the programme was a Syrian refugee hosted in Lebanon that came to know the initiative searching on Google for the name of one of the professors in Aleppo.

We already cooperated and collaborated with the University of Aleppo, we had in our didactic offer a lecture on informatics' fundamentals provided and recorded by professors from Aleppo University. Thus, this student looked for the name of this professor, found out about our initiative and then applied for the scholarship. He was the first one to be granted one of our scholarships (Caforio, Personal Communication, April 27, 2018).

To study at Uninettuno students just need to have access to the internet. For their final exams, they do not have to go to Rome, even though the assessments are not performed online, but in presence with the supervision of professors. Uninettuno has a

network of “technological poles”, which are a sort of Learning Centres where students can schedule and perform their exams. In Italy, there are 30 of those technological poles.

The university has students from 164 countries. For those who do not live in Italy, Uninettuno has agreements with other universities that work as the technological poles available in Italy. The university also holds agreements with the Italian Embassies and the Italian Institute of culture in many countries. These institutes become Uninettuno’s classrooms, and the embassy staff or that of the Italian Institute of culture supervise the exams, check for the students’ IDs and connects them in video-conferences with the professors in Rome. That is how they can study and that is why the only costs covered by the scholarships are that of the tuition fees.

The students have access to all the materials that they need to study online: video-lectures, essays, textbooks, exercises, and they also interact with other students and with the professors using the online platform. The platform was developed between 2015 and 2016, then the initiative was launched in the spring of 2016 during the conference of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). In 2017, Uninettuno received the funding of the Cariplo Foundation and was able to enrol the students. The first 50 scholarships were provided directly by the university, with no external funding from the public or private sectors. Afterwards, there were an additional 20 scholarships funded by the Cariplo Foundation.

In April of 2018, there was a total of 70 scholarships issued, with 59 assigned students, being 39 of them residents in Italy. The gender discrepancy between enrolled students is enormous: 55 men and only four women. Professor Caforio (Personal Communication, April 27, 2018) explained that it depends on the applications received. The first 40 scholarships were only provided to citizens entitled with international protection, and then there were other 19 provided both for international protection holders and asylum-seekers.

Uninettuno did not have an overwhelming number of requests for the scholarships. At first, this HEI was surprised by the fact that most of the requests came from outside of Italy. There were applicants from Lebanon, Turkey, Germany, Syria, Afghanistan and so on. Then Uninettuno started to promote the initiative within Italy by contacting NGOs that were dealing directly with refugees and asylum-seekers, providing them with social services. They also contacted SPRAR, but most of the prospective students in the SPRAR



centres who wanted to apply did not have international protection status yet, nor have they completed upper secondary school, so Uninettuno began to provide free Italian language courses for them.

The professionals in charge of analysing the applications are from the secretariat of each specific faculty, since there are scientific committees for each scientific degree. Uninettuno is structured in 6 faculties: engineering, economics, communications, psychology, law and cultural heritage. Each of them created committees of professors, and the process aimed at implementing the guidelines described by the ENIC-NARIC. There was an online form created for the students who wanted to apply for the scholarships. They had to provide a self-declaration of their studies, that is, the school they attended, their study titles and, if they were able to, documents. Following that, Uninettuno checked their eligibility to enrol in an Italian university, since they had to have completed at least 12 years of school in order to attend an academic course.

Some of the applicants provided evidence of the completion of their degree programmes in their countries of origin, others just declared that they were enrolled in a university and completed specific lectures. Uninettuno asked them to provide specifications for each lecture they attended, with the name of the professors and a summary of the course contents. Subsequently, the technical committee performed a verification accessing public databases and other sources without contacting the home institutions, so that the lives of students would not be put at risk. In some cases, when the committee was not able to verify evidence, the students were asked to do admission exams in order to verify their declared competencies. When all was verified, they were enrolled in the academic programme. Some were rejected because they were not able to provide practical evidence of their competences for attending a degree level programme, but the majority was able to provide either documents or other sorts of evidence.

Uninettuno has also contacted CIMEA, but Professor Caforio (Personal Communication, April 27, 2018) explained that the university did not want to obtain the recognition of the study titles, because the students were not able to provide it. Therefore, Uninettuno limited itself to use the guidelines provided by CIMEA / ENIC-NARIC. At the time of the interview, all of the students were in their first academic year. The only requirement that would be asked from them to renew their scholarships was the

demonstration that they are active students, since the e-learning system supervises all their behaviour.

We know if the student was connected, how much time s/he spent on the platform, etc. If a student was absolutely not active he would not be renewed. We haven't established, as far as I know, renewal criteria based on a minimum number of credits or of courses to be passed. Also because we know that most of them, if newly arrived, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders. We cannot expect them to be super students in the first year, but the course is something that can be useful for them to interact with other people and to start doing something normal, like studying in a university (Caforio, Personal Communication, April 27, 2018).

Concerning the languages in which the students can attend their courses, Uninettuno rendered Engineering courses (civil engineering, management engineering and ICT engineering bachelor degrees) available in four languages: Italian, English, French and Arabic; also, the Faculty of Economics provided both the bachelor and master's degree in Italian and English. Therefore, for English speaking students there were a lot of choices. Some of them chose the one-year post-bachelor course in European Law and Policies, also available in English. There were those who enrolled in courses provided only in Italian, and for them, Uninettuno provided Italian language courses, so they would achieve at least the upper intermediary level of the Italian language. The Italian language course was not only taught online but also in person at the technological pole in Milan.

Regarding psychological support, Professor Caforio (Personal Communication, April 27, 2018) says that it is difficult to provide this service through the online platform. The way around that Uninettuno found for that was to provide orientation and counselling in centres activated especially for these students. These centres are held by the psychology faculty and usually provide support to students from all countries and who are going through some difficulties and are looking for motivation. The professionals who give support are psychologists registered in the National Italian Psychology Association and who are entitled to interact with students going through this sort of difficulties. This service is offered in person and is available only for those scholarships provided by the Cariplo foundation – not because Cariplo funds them but because one of the requirements

for this kind of scholarships was that the students had to be hosted in the Lombardia region.

We started to create cooperation agreements with NGOs in Lombardia, and then we were able to create a specific technological pole in Milan, hosted in one of the SPRAR centres for refugees. There they seek for students interested in the scholarships. By having them concentrated in Milan, we were able to provide more “in presence” services, both for language, support and mentoring in general. One of our researchers from the communication faculty was in Milan once a week to ask the students how was it going, if they were facing any difficulties, and then he reported the results for our headquarters in Rome. If they have difficulties, we try to figure out what can be done. So, in this case of Lombardia, we were able to provide more direct and focused support. That was only possible because we could meet them in a physical place (Caforio, Personal Communication, April 27, 2018).

At Uninettuno there is a distinction between professors who record the lectures and professors who are dealing directly with the students. The video-lectures are like a textbook in a traditional course. Textbooks may be written by different professionals from those who are going to interact with the students. The video-lectures are the core component of all the material a student can use to study by him or herself. They can work on these video-lectures and online contents where and whenever they want. The material is available on-demand.

Most of the video-lectures were recorded before the programme for refugees started. The professors who are in charge of dealing with the students must meet them online, and they were trained to deal with people in post-traumatic situations before interacting with the refugees. The training was held by researchers and professors from the faculty of psychology. The training targeted on professors coming from various areas, such as communications, engineering, economics and so on.

In case the beneficiaries of international protection or asylum-seekers felt they could not follow the lessons, they receive individual tutoring, since this is a part of Uninettuno’s standard model. Even regular students do not have to overcome their difficulties alone. The professors meet the students online once a week. This is also when they can be in touch with other students, debating and discussing the topics assigned to

them and raising problems and issues with their colleagues. In the case of the refugee students, the professors were invited to organize specific orientation and mentoring on top of the regular interactive class sessions. Therefore, they benefit from both standard interactive classes and mentoring/supporting classes that are held in the beginning, middle and end of their courses.

Regarding the main challenges faced by Uninettuno, there were not any issues concerning interculturality or multiculturality. The difficulty was to reorganise the mentoring and tutoring activities to provide the students with proper support, especially because refugee students are most likely to drop out the graduation than regular students. This is because they don't feel comfortable to restart studying or they don't feel self-efficient in performing complex tasks like studying in academic level courses.

From the organisational point of view, the staff had to deal with the applications' procedure, setting up activities that satisfied the rector's expectations to provide services for the students who belong to minorities and have lesser opportunities. In addition, they needed to create a system that would not be attacked by bureaucracy, such as enrolling someone who could not be enrolled. The HEI had to do a lot of administrative and preparative work before the call for applications. Another challenge was that, in the beginning, Uninettuno had the scholarships available but no one in Italy was applying for it, so they had to create a network for its divulgation.

The university is aware of the conditions under which the students are living, but there is no formal report about it. The students from Lombardia are equipped with personal computers and broadband connection in a classroom that is part of the refugee camp where they live (an internet provider in Italy cooperated with the project). This is an environment where students can use their computers, smartphones and other devices.

One of Uninettuno's missions is to democratise access to knowledge, since it is through knowledge that one can improve his/her personal and social condition levels. Consequently, in both personal and social perspectives, it is an asset to facilitate access to higher education. Uninettuno expects that providing the students with a study title of higher education level acknowledged in Italy – and therefore in Europe because they are part of the ECTS system – the students' lives will be improved, since they can look for jobs that require specific degree levels. Uninettuno's strategic vision is that more

opportunities for all are led by more education, and understanding different cultures and developing the ability to think in different ways have a human impact.

The institution has some agreements of cooperation regarding job-seeking programmes for its students. Before the final dissertation, they are required to do internships that count from two to five credits, depending on their study plans. Uninettuno holds agreements with Italian small, medium and large enterprises and public administration bodies to provide work experience for the students before they complete their programmes.

This is for all of our students, but you have to consider that most of our students are working students, so they don't need this. They already have these credits because they already work. We have agreements also with services of job placements, so our students can provide their curriculum and benefit from special conditions (Caforio, Personal Communication, April 27, 2018).

The degree that the students obtain is Italian, and since Uninettuno is part of the ECTS, it is valid in all of the countries which are part of the ECTS system as well. The university has a few specific agreements with countries in the Mediterranean area. In Egypt, for example, Uninettuno's diploma is considered valid because there is a common curricula degree with one of their universities. The same for Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan. There are also agreements with countries beyond the Mediterranean, such as Kazakhstan, China, Russia, and also in Latin America.

Uninettuno has flexibility in relation to the place from where the students attend their courses. They can go around the world during the years of their degree programme, being able to keep studying and obtain their title afterwards. In case the students are not awarded international protection or are still waiting for a decision, Uninettuno is not able to sponsor them to get student visas. The exchange students are usually managed through Erasmus, that is, exchange programs are not discussed directly with the students.

Uninettuno has institutional cooperation, but do not receive exchange students without specific funding or support from international programmes. The students who are currently in Italy (not with international protection status, but with student visas) applied through institutional exchange programmes, not directly with Uninettuno.

Another component of Uninettuno's refugee initiative is the recognition of their professional profiles in order to provide certification of their professional competences and skills – even if they do not have academic titles – creating technical-scientific committees. The HEI is working on that and trying to apply for a European project to provide this kind of service with some funding support. Uninettuno is also working on the creation of a cultural course called “Mutual Rights and Duties” that comprises two or three lectures about the first measures that immigrants have to take in Italy, such as how to renew their staying permits.

Uninettuno is also trying to get involved in more European projects focusing on integration and social inclusion solutions for migrants and refugees. The HEI has a project about the use of refugees' smartphones as personal diaries, which involves workshops held by photography directors who teach the students to use their smartphones beyond the stereotypes of Instagram and YouTube “banalization”. Furthermore, the HEI is willing to participate of the Horizon 2020 programme for the enhancement of the efficiency of services provided for refugees by the public administration and NGOs, including education and language courses (Caforio, Personal Communication, April 27, 2018).

#### IV.1.e. Università del Salento

The CRUI/Ministero dell'Interno funds most of the scholarships available for refugees and subsidiary protection holders at Università del Salento. The initiative for welcoming beneficiaries of international protection started in the 2016/2017 academic year, along with the CRUI / Ministero dell'Interno scholarships' call for applications.

Professor Marco Ferri (Personal Communication, June 17, 2018), member of the technical-administrative staff of the Università del Salento's International Office, explained that in the second year of the call for applications there were also prospective students who were beneficiaries of humanitarian protection (besides refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries). However, this status is not valid for the CRUI / Ministero dell'Interno scholarships, so those applicants were not awarded. In some other cases, the refugee or subsidiary protection status of the students had not yet been recognised by the immigration department, so the applications were rejected. However,

those applicants were integrated through particular decisions of governing bodies afterwards.

This was only possible because the Università del Salento has a strong connection with the police department, what allowed the institution to offer services to some other students, even if they did not get the CRUI/Ministero dell'Interno scholarship. In this alternative sort of scholarship, the tuition fees and housing were financed by the university itself.

The value of the scholarship funded directly by the university using the Estate's budget is lower than that of CRUI/Ministero dell'Interno scholarships, but free housing is provided for its beneficiaries, so the accommodation expenses are not deducted from the total value. Beneficiaries of international protection who are awarded scholarships are exempt from paying the 1500 € annual fee for the university.

In the first year of Università del Salento's welcoming of refugees (2016/2017 academic year), there were five students enrolled. Three of them were granted the CRUI / Ministero dell'Interno scholarships and the other two were granted the Università del Salento scholarship. Some students resigned after the first year because they did not achieve the minimum number of credits required to have their scholarships renewed.

All of the awarded students were men. Four of them were under 35 years old, and only one was over 40. The origins of the students were Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan. Most of them chose to study sociology and social research because those courses are taught in English. The Computer Engineering course is also another option of English-taught course.

In the 2017/2018 academic year, there were five beneficiaries of international protection enrolled at Università del Salento. Three of them were continuing their studies because they had their scholarships renewed from the previous year of 2016/2017. The other two were new students who enrolled in the academic year of 2017/2018.

Refugee students from Università del Salento also participate of Università del Salento's "Welcoming Day", a promotional event that takes place yearly at the beginning of the academic year, usually during the first week of October. This event involves the participation of international students (both degree-seeking and mobility students) and

foresees the depicting of academic services devoted to international students and delivered by administrative and academic units.

Regarding the selection procedures, the international protection students were selected just like the Italian students. Professor Ferri (Personal Communication, June 17, 2018) says that there were not so many applications; some of the potential applicants seemed interested in the first steps of the process and then resigned. In the first year of the call for scholarships, the information about the possibility of applying was widespread among the beneficiaries of international protection via the police department. In the second year, the call for scholarships was published at Università del Salento's website and also spread among the community.

Regarding the recognition of credentials obtained by beneficiaries of international protection in their countries of origin, some applicants had some of their documents with them, and in those cases, the evaluation of the credentials occurred without problems. In some other cases, the university asked for CIMEA's help.

All of the beneficiaries of international protection enrolled in the 2016/2017 academic year attended master's programmes. It was only in the year of 2017/2018 that the university received its first bachelor's degree student. "These students are really motivated, they want to further their education and have the same performance as the Italian students" (Ferri, Personal Communication, June 17, 2018).

The professors of the Università del Salento did not receive specialised training or orientation to teach and support beneficiaries of international protection. However, they already knew the students, since they had to interview them for the applications, and so they were aware of the problems and difficulties that those students had concerning the integration with other students and the university.

If the beneficiaries of international protection have difficulties to follow the lessons, they are provided with individual tutoring. Professors are available to advise how to solve academic related issues. Apart from their academic lives, beneficiaries of international protection receive individual attention from the university in terms of housing. They live all together in the same accommodation, sharing a multicultural and multilinguistic community. Professor Ferri (Personal Communication, June 17, 2018) says this is a unique situation. The University has one apartment for foreign students and



visiting professors, and the most significant part of this apartment is reserved for the beneficiaries of international protection.

The primary challenge faced by the university regarding the integration of refugee students is that the institution's staff must know how to interact with them. The HEI has to work on proper intercultural training to provide better approaches for all matters. The main goals and expectations of Università del Salento regarding the future of the beneficiaries of international protection are to make them able to be independent and find jobs after their studies. One of the students is already working in his area – he is an advisor in a refugees' NGO. He studied economics in his home country but changed the course of his studies in Italy to engage in something different. No matter what professional path the students decide to take, the objective of the university is to help them integrate into the society and Italian labour market.

#### IV.1.f. Università degli Studi di Trento

The Università degli Studi di Trento has the exceptional condition of providing scholarships not only for refugees and subsidiary protection holders but also for asylum-seekers and humanitarian protection holders. Nataša Vučković, coordinator of the experimental project for the welcoming of asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, answered the University Staff Questionnaire [Annex 2] in June 22, 2018. She explained that the university became able to welcome asylum-seeker students after signing an agreement (Provincia Autonoma di Trento & Università degli Studi di Trento, 2016) with the Autonomous Province of Trento and the Cinformi (Immigration Information Centre).

Trento and Bolzano are the only Italian provinces that are not entirely subject to national rules and are called autonomous because they have legislative autonomy. The other Italian provinces are subject to the procedures determined by the Ministero dell'Interno, who suggests that asylum-seekers should have access to vocational training courses but not to more extensive university courses, i.e. bachelor, masters and PhD degrees (CIR et al., 2010). The provision of the opportunity for asylum-seekers to enrol in university courses is essential, so more candidates would be able to access Italian higher education without depending on the development of the bureaucratic activity that governs the asylum concession.

The scholarships provided by the Università degli Studi di Trento cover the university tuition fees, food, housing and transport expenses. It also offers the library and sports centres cards for free. Furthermore, students can have a part-time job (150-400 hours per year) from the first year in order to have money in cash, since the value of the scholarship is offered only as services.

There are no specific institutions or persons who finance the Università degli Studi di Trento scholarships. Each participant of the agreement (Provincia Autonoma di Trento & Università degli Studi di Trento, 2016) offers autonomously financed services to the students of the project (active since 2015/16 academic year). At that time, four students enrolled: one woman from Cameroon who had humanitarian protection status; two men from the Gambia – one with humanitarian protection and the other with international protection status; and one man from Pakistan with humanitarian protection status. Two of them left the project and the other two continued their education (the woman from Cameroon and one of the men from the Gambia).

In the 2016/2017 academic year, five students enrolled, and they were still involved in the project in 2017/2018. Two of them would have to pass the admission tests in order to remain in the project and renew their scholarships. This second group was composed of two women from Ivory Coast (both with humanitarian protection); one man from Guinea with humanitarian protection; one man from Iraq with international protection; and one man from Venezuela who was an asylum-seeker when he enrolled and by May of 2018 was still waiting for the territorial commission's decision on his asylum claim.

In the II semester of the 2017/2018 academic year, 23 applicants were going through the first phase of the selection for the scholarships. For this selection, Università degli Studi di Trento was counting on the help of Cinformi. At the time when Nataša Vučković answered the questionnaire (June 22, 2018), the university was moving forward to the last selection phase, in which they would have to choose between 13 students, since they had five places available for the process. Those students would officially start studying from the 2018/19 academic year. Thus, in May 2018 the university had seven enrolled students, being three women (from Cameroon and Ivory Coast) and four men (from Venezuela, Iraq, Gambia and Guinea).

To be considered eligible for the scholarships, applicants must have attended 12 years of certified education and achieve at least the basic level of Italian language (B1). In the two first years of the selection any of the applications were rejected. The responsible for the first selection procedure was Cinformi (Information Centre for Immigration), a provincial institution who is also in charge of collecting the applications. The Office for Equality and Diversity (which is part of the university's staff) and the Vice-Rector for the Equality and Diversity Policy held the second phase of selections. The information about the opening of the application process was widespread among the beneficiaries of international protection through the Cinformi, who communicated the call for applications to its users.

The Training and Student Management Office is in charge of the recognition of credentials obtained by beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers in their countries of origin. In order to renew their scholarships, students must achieve 35 CFU in two academic years. The University of Trento offers courses in Italian, English, French, Spanish and German. The availability depends on the faculty where the applicants choose to study. The academic courses are taught in attendance and the language courses are available via e-learning.

The professors of the University of Trento did not receive any sort of specialized training or orientation to teach and support the beneficiaries of international protection. The performance of the beneficiaries of international protection is somehow distinctly evaluated and supervised, in comparison to native students. There are facilitated versions of the admission test for the access to the University, and in regard to the maintenance of the scholarships, regular students are required to achieve 35 credits in one academic year, while this period of time has been extended to two years for the students in the refugees'/asylum-seekers' project.

In case beneficiaries of international protection have difficulties to follow the lessons, they receive individual tutoring through a specialist buddy programme. The university also offers psychological support services for beneficiaries of international protection. The accommodations where beneficiaries of international are living are supervised by the *Opera Universitaria*, who manages and supervises university housing. The primary challenge faced by the university regarding this programme is the struggle

regarding integration, since the institution has not yet managed to start a social programme.

The main goal and expectation of the Università degli Studi di Trento regarding the future of the beneficiaries of international protection are to help them to build a better future for themselves.

#### IV.1.g. A summary of the main challenges and possible solutions

The following table summarizes the difficulties faced by the universities that remain as challenges. Such challenges still demand a lot of reflection and work to be overcome. Some of the possible solutions are listed below [Table 4].

Table 4. Summary of the actions performed by the universities

University	Number of Students with International Protection	Required status to be eligible for scholarships	Funding sources	Main difficulties faced by the institution	Possible solutions
Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CRU/Ministero dell'Interno</li> <li>ADISU</li> </ul>	To bring the understanding to the society that it is convenient and beneficial to the university to welcome refugee students	Events and programmes to share the refugees' culture and heritage. That would reinforce the benefits that they bring to the Italian society with their knowledge and expertise
Università degli Studi di Ferrara	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public fundings managed by the university itself</li> </ul>	No particular difficulties reported by the university. However, by talking to the students it was possible to identify that the absence of qualified professionals working on their reception is a problem	Having cultural mediators working on the process of integration of the foreign students
Università degli Studi di Pavia	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private initiative</li> <li>Public fundings managed by the university itself</li> </ul>	The social integration of the refugee students into the students' community and the ongoing difficult situations in their countries of origin whilst they are in Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social programmes to stimulate the cultural exchange between refugees and Italian students</li> <li>Providing more time for refugee students to conclude their graduations</li> </ul>
Università Telematica Uninettuno	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum-seeker (in particular cases)</li> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private initiative</li> <li>The university itself</li> </ul>	The fact that refugee students are most likely to drop out the graduation than regular students	Reorganising the mentoring and tutoring activities to provide the students with proper support
Università del Salento	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CRU/Ministero dell'Interno</li> <li>Public fundings managed by the university itself</li> </ul>	Interaction between the institution's staff and the students	Provide the staff with proper intercultural training, so they can build a better relationship with the students
Università degli Studi di Trento	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum-seeker</li> <li>Refugee</li> <li>Subsidiary protection</li> <li>Humanitarian protection</li> </ul>	No specific institutions or persons. Each participant of the agreement between Provincia Autonoma di Trento and Università degli Studi di Trento offers autonomously financed services to the students of the project.	The integration of the refugee students within the society	Start a social programme focusing on the promotion of the interaction between refugee students, native students and staff members

Source: author's elaboration, 2018.

The psychological support is another element that plays a vital role in refugees' adaptation to the new country where they are living. It is also essential for the challenges that they are going to confront while rebuilding their lives. In the case of the students who cooperated to this research, this help might have been found as soon as they arrived in Italy – through NGO initiatives, for example – or later on, when they started their studies in the universities. Some ended up never having this professional support, either because they think they do not need it or because they could not find it.

On this matter, information is more critical than ever. Among the students who answered the questionnaire, there were those who, within the same university, said they were provided with psychological support and others who said they were not, even though they wanted. That means that even in the institutions where this service is available, sometimes the students do not have access to it because they were not informed about this possibility. A cultural mediator working within the universities would be of the utmost importance to let the students know about all the services that are available for them, including psychological accompaniment.

Professor Fausta Scardigno (Personal Communication, April 23, 2018), from the Università degli Studi di Bari, explains that their students were not receiving psychological support yet. She highlighted that this would be appropriate and needed from 2018.

Honestly, until last year we have not faced cases that strongly required psychological support. This year we had two students who needed it though. In the first year of the scholarships, the students who arrived already had considerable experience of work. In fact, they made a detour for the studies, but they already had a lot of work experience. They are not students that correspond to that imaginary of disembarking in Italy, that is, those in a first situation of extreme despair. When they arrive at the university they have already matured, and therefore the psychological support concerns cases that definitely exist, but hardly reach the university". (Scardigno, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

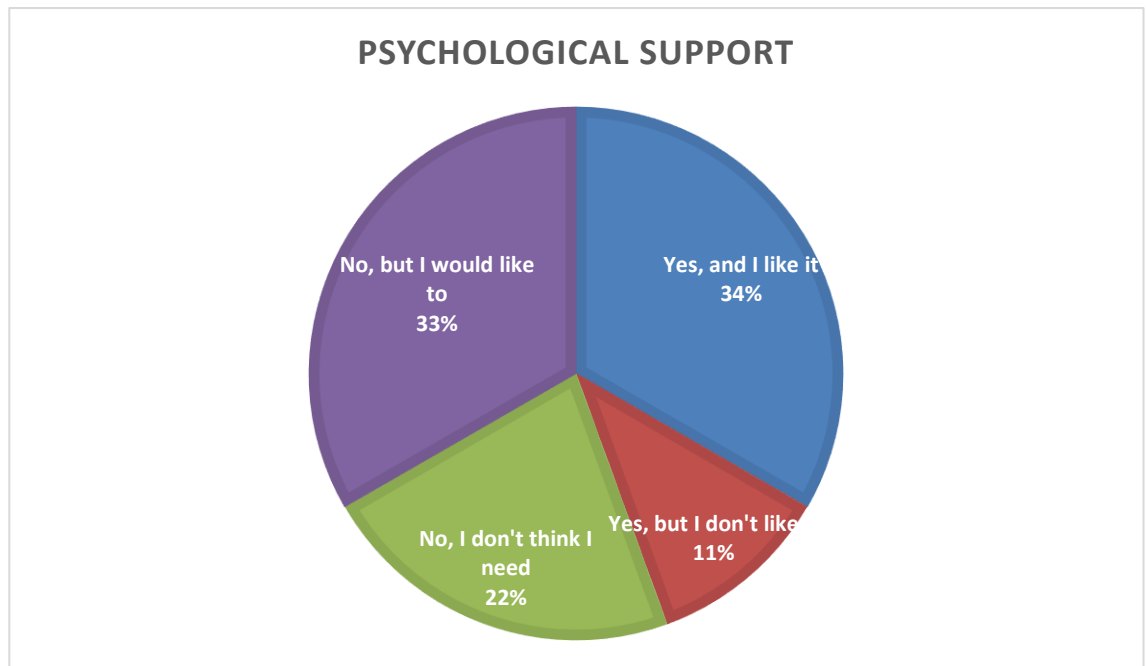
S2 (Personal Communication, April 23, 2018) received psychological support as soon as she got in touch with the NGO that helped her when she arrived in Italy. Her psychologist was a woman and that was vital for her at the time because her main reason for leaving her country was misogyny.

She spoke to me to know my story and she prepared me. She told me what the procedures would be like, where I should go. So I wasn't alone, there were some people with me. It was part of a small project that helps women in difficult situations. There were me, another woman from Eritrea and also a Moroccan woman participating. So, we were three women. (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

This project mentioned by S2 was a small initiative that happened for a short period. It is not running anymore, but it worked for enough time to help her and the two other women. All the information S2 needed she got from the people responsible for the project at the NGO. The psychologist that supported her was from IOM (International Organisation for Migrations). S2 did not receive psychological support in the university, but she says she did not ask for it and thinks they would have helped if she requested this service.

In the opinion of S3, everybody needs psychological support. “In my work, I did many interviews with the psychiatrists and I took the guys who needed support because my job is to translate what the doctors say and to make understandable those things they want to tell the patients” (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018). He thinks psychological support does not come only from psychologists and psychiatrists, but also from words spoken by the others. He never asked for psychological support, even though he had access to it, but he encourages everyone who is not thinking clearly to seek advice.

Among the students who answered the survey, many of them liked the psychological support that was provided while others were not given this kind of aid, even though they would like to have this service [Figure 4].



*Figure 4. Psychological support.  
Source: author's elaboration, 2018.*

#### IV.2. Students' background

According to Eurostat (2017), 10.4% of all immigrants from outside the EU living in Italy in 2015 attended higher education before immigrating. In 2016 the percentage was of 10%, and in 2017, 9.9%. The share of women in this index exceeds that of men. Between 2015 and 2017, approximately 13% of the newly arrived female immigrants in Italy had attended university in their countries of origin, while this figure ranged from 7.5 to 6.7% among men.

The opinions of 16 students were considered in this study. Despite the number of men who benefit from international protection within the universities being much higher than that of women, it is a privilege to have the contribution of a female majority and to be able to echo their voice in this work. Three women and four men gave interviews while six women and three men answered the questionnaire [Annex 1].

As for their age, ten students are between 20 and 29 years old, five between 30 and 39, and one between 40 and 49. Their origins are diverse: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. By the time these students were interviewed or answered the questionnaire (between April and July of 2018), 12 of them were refugees, three benefitted from humanitarian protection and one was seeking asylum.



Regarding their economic situation, most of them reported having a favourable financial condition in their countries of origin. Only one considered herself poor, while all the others evaluated themselves as pertaining to the medium class, upper medium class or even wealthy. The number of refugees that reach Europe is meagre, especially when we compare it with the statistics of asylum-seekers living in African, Asian and Middle-East countries. Only those who have access to information know about the possibility to flee from their countries. Access to information is usually provided by education, and to have access to education one generally must have money. Those who do not have the means to reach Europe might choose to flee to nearby countries.

Tiny Lebanon, for example, “hosted more than 1 million refugees from Syria, in addition to several hundred thousand long-term Palestinian refugees and more than 20,000 refugees from other countries” (Amnesty International, 2018). Meanwhile, the whole EU had 1,260,910 asylum and first-time asylum applicants in 2016, and 712,235 in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018a). For these reasons, it does not make sense to spread the idea that the EU is suffering from a refugee “invasion”. Ten countries hosted over half of the world’s refugees by the end of 2015 and none of them are European [Figure 5].

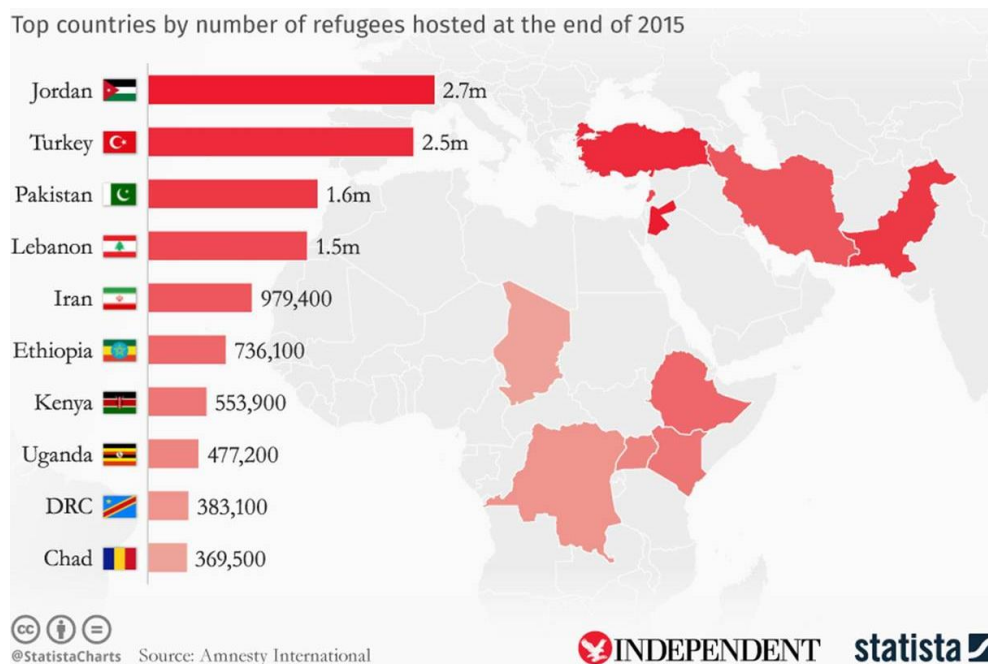


Figure 5. 10 countries host over half the world’s refugees

Source: Reprinted from Independent UK, url: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/refugee-crisis-amnesty-international-10-countries-host-more-half-uk-needs-to-do-more-a7344171.html>.

Copyright (2016).

Each of these students had severe reasons for leaving their countries of origin. Their journeys were, and still are, tough and full of challenges. War is a frequent subject among their stories. Student 1 (S1) emigrated from Palestine to study abroad, but he was not able to return home after finishing his studies: “Because of the war it is complicated to go back home. The border was closed, until now it's closed”. S4 was born in Afghanistan and also had to leave her country – more than once – because of decade-long wars:

I lived as a refugee in Pakistan because my generation was born in war and we grew up in war, so most of us were born in the neighbouring countries. There was a time when our parents couldn't live there [in Afghanistan] anymore, so many people left the country. I was born in my hometown, but then we immigrated to Pakistan and we came back to Afghanistan a while after, when I was 13. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

The armed conflict led S6 to leave Syria three years ago. Even though the situation was difficult for a long time, she struggled to stay in her country. First, her parents went to Lebanon and she stayed in Syria trying to continue her undergraduate studies. She was in the last year of her bachelor's in English Literature. Unfortunately, the situation in her hometown became unbearable and she could not make it to the end of the course, so she went to Lebanon to meet her parents. After a couple of months, the family met an Italian organisation that assisted them to move to Italy. The story repeats with S8, who also had to leave Syria because of war. Another ongoing armed conflict, this time in Europe, forced S7 to leave Ukraine a few years ago.

Political persecution is among the main reasons that lead people to flee as well. This is the case of S3, who fled from Pakistan, S9, from Libya, S12, from Cameroon, S13, from Ivory Coast, S5 and S15, both from the Gambia.

The Gambia is a small country in West Africa with about two million people. We had a very bad president, a dictator. Now he is not in power anymore because he was overthrown by a coalition government. The citizens didn't want him, he doesn't respect human rights and he treated people like animals. He killed a lot of people and the situation was not favourable, the living standards were zero, people didn't have the right to live as human beings there. [...] There was torture, the conditions in the prisons are unfavourable, unacceptable, and against any form of humanity.

There is no place like home, but these are the things that lead people to leave. (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018)

S4 said that besides war, other reasons led her to leave Afghanistan: “in the smaller circle, we have our own issues that are so difficult to be dealt with because the law of our country doesn’t support women’s rights”. Gender persecution was the main issue that forced S2 to flee from Yemen. There is a strong “hate for women”, she says, and a culture that does not respect women at all.

We are poorly treated, we don't have rights. We have half rights always, we are half human beings. [...] I don't want only half rights, I don't want to be a half human. I want to be a complete human. I want peace. [...] I was already so tired to live with people that don't respect me. It was inside me that I could not live like this. Always threatened, always having problems. (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

Two students who answered the questionnaire also mentioned ethnic and religious discrimination as the main issues that motivated them to leave their home countries. The reasons referred to in this study are only a few among many others that force people to be away from home, from their families, from their friends, from their own stories and everything they are familiar with. Leaving is an act of courage and, quite often, it is even a choice between life and death. These students have chosen to live. Supporting them is a duty of every person who can help in any way.

Their journeys are always hard, being mentally, and often physically, exhaustive. Many of them travelled with people smugglers under terrible conditions, others began their suffering paths even before finding such smugglers. S5 went through a lot before arriving in Italy:

I was a student like you and then, in the weekends, I used to work as an apprentice in a construction field, so I developed skills to know how to build a house. That experience helped me a lot in Libya. With a little bit of experience, you can have a little bit of monetary compensation, so I used that experience to earn some money and to make a living there. The people I worked for... Sometimes they pay you, sometimes they don't. It's their country, they can kill you if you ask too much. [...] Living there was crazy, up to a certain point when it was unbearable and it forced people to leave. As we were forced to leave our own countries, we were forced again to leave Libya, because you see people dying every day, you see people being beat every day. People go to your home to ask for money and threat you with guns.

Everybody is afraid of a gun, so you pay. When it is too much, maybe your system can't bear it anymore, you need to find another solution. [...] So I went to Italy on a deadly boat. It's not something that a human being should use to cross the Mediterranean. In Libya, you prefer to die in the ocean than staying there. (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018)

Not all these students had Italy in mind when they fled. In fact, out of nine students who answered the questionnaire, two of them said Italy was not their focus when they arrived in the EU. Among the seven interviewed students, two of them tried to seek asylum in northern European countries first, one lived in a refugee camp in Greece before going to Italy, and another went to five African countries before disembarking in the Italian coast.

Those who went to northern European countries reported a huge difficulty to apply for asylum there. Such difficulty is increased by the Dublin Regulation, which determines that foreigners must apply for asylum in the EU country where they arrive first. Thus, if a person arrives in Italy and then goes to Norway, for example, this person must go back to Italy to apply for asylum. Theoretically, this rule was supposed to work well for all EU countries, since the beneficiaries of international protection would be relocated throughout the block after the decision of their request was made. However, countries bathed by the Mediterranean Sea have a high share of asylum-seekers (compared to other European nations) who wait an average of one year to have their requests quite often denied.

Greece and Italy do not have the proper structure to deal with the quantity of asylum claims they were entitled to in the last few years and, instead of helping, “the Dublin system increases pressures on the external border regions of the EU and harshly disrupts the lives of those fleeing to Europe for protection” (UNHCR & ECRE, 2009). Sometimes the officers are not even able to give information or do the correct procedure with the asylum-seekers. S4 lost her passport when she arrived in Europe, then the Italian police took her ID card and never gave it back. She says she cannot ask for help to make new documents in the Embassy of her country: “I have political asylum, so probably my Embassy will not help me”.

Despite the average time asylum-seekers wait to be granted international protection in Italy being of one year, there are those who must wait much longer, like S5, who waited for more than two years. The first decision on his claim for international

protection was negative, and he had to hire a lawyer who filed a lawsuit to reverse the verdict. The asylum-seekers who goes through this situation must pay for the lawyer's honorarium – which they sometimes do not have the financial means to support – and also deal with the lengthening of the fragile and uncertain condition in which they find themselves.

S11, from Guinea, S13, from Ivory Coast and S7, from Ukraine, also had to wait two years for the decisions of their asylum claims. S10, from Iraq, had to wait for more than three years. Most Italian universities require candidates to have refugee status or another sort of international protection in order to enrol in their courses. This means that during the time asylum-seekers wait for the decision and decision on their processes, they cannot attend academic courses.

I was willing to ask about getting into the university before I got the response from the *questura* [about the asylum process outcome], but they told me I could not apply before getting the permit to stay in Italy, so I had to wait until I got my response. It was a little bit difficult because after we get the refugee status we just have six months to benefit from the government [aid], and after this period the government doesn't help us anymore. I tried to go to the university in Venice, then they said they could help me in the first six months while I was living in the government project [house], but from the time this period was finished I would have to pay for it by myself, and I was not able to do it, of course. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

The international protection is also mandatory for obtaining the scholarship offered by the Italian government. Even those who were granted humanitarian protection are not eligible for this support. The only acceptable status for this category of financial aid are refugee or subsidiary protection.

#### IV.2.a. Access to higher education among refugees

One of the difficulties often reported by the students is the lack of information. Before arriving in Europe, none of them knew how to apply for asylum nor the way the processes were carried out. “I didn't have any idea of how Europe was, how it would be to get rid of the situation I was in. I didn't know that the asylum procedure was so tough”, says S4. Some of the asylum-seekers had support from NGOs and government reception centres,

others relied on the friendships they made along their journeys or after their arrivals, but mostly they had to find it out by themselves.

I arrived in Rome when I came from my country and there I realised it wouldn't be easy because there was already a lot of people. I met some people in the station, they told me 'go away from here, it's not a good place for an alone girl to stay'. So, that was how I decided to go to Norway, I knew people there. Then, later, when I was already living illegally and I got the negative [asylum] reply from Norway and Sweden, there were some organizations who support illegal immigrants in Sweden and they gave me support. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

Finding scholarship opportunities is not an easy task either. The students mentioned the difficulty to find web pages with information written in languages other than Italian, since none of them was familiar with the idiom before arriving in the country. S6 explains that it was quite difficult to find scholarships on the internet. "Finding it in Italian is so hard. My sister is looking for scholarships too right now and she is facing the same difficulty". Also, she said she could not find any scholarships that would allow her to apply before being granted the refugee status. The university where she studies now was the only one that she found, since it was too late to apply.

The students who answered the questionnaire were asked to classify in a scale from 1 to 10 how hard it was for them to access higher education in Italy (being 1 very easy and 10 very hard). Among the eight of them who answered this question, only one found it too easy, attributing the grade 1. All the others classified as 6 and above. The graphic below [Figure 6] is based on their replies and show that most found it quite difficult to access higher education in Italy.

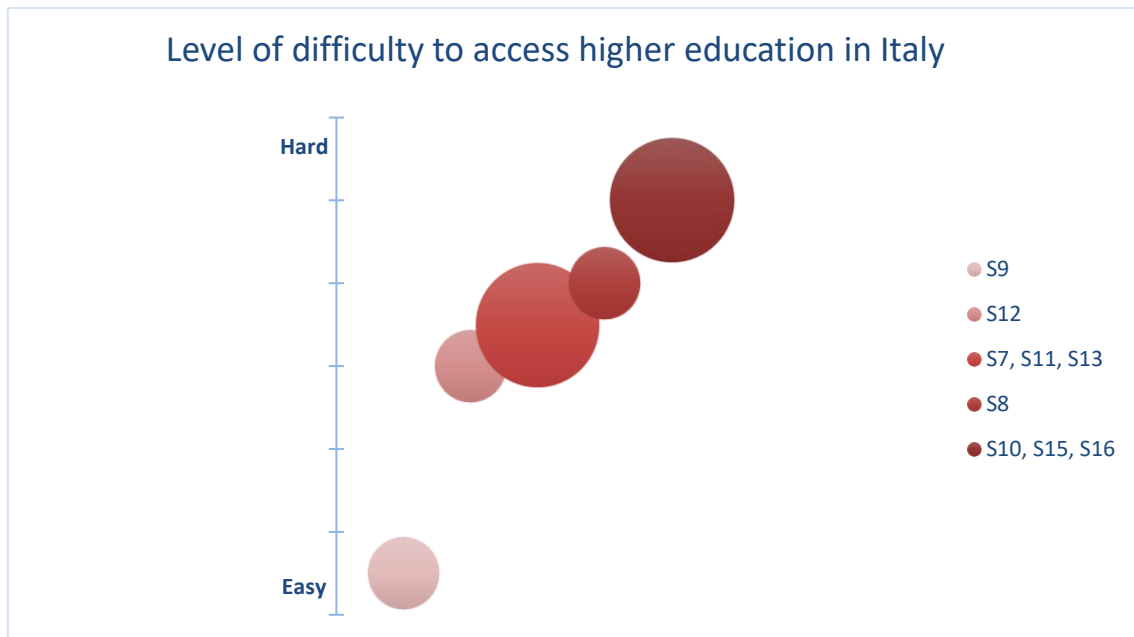


Figure 6. Level of difficulty to access higher education in Italy.  
Source: author's elaboration, 2018.

S4 points out that, for her, it was not a lengthy procedure with the paperwork, but she calls attention to the fact that she was able to bring all her documents from her home country with her. Besides, she did her bachelor in an institution that uses the European credit system and has a partnership with European universities. S4 attended her undergraduate studies in English in her home country and obtained good scores. Since the master course, she applied for in Italy is taught in English, she thinks this is the reason why the university did not have any other inquiries for her.

#### IV.2.b. From the language barrier to student integration

All 16 students engaged in learning Italian while waiting for the decision on their asylum applications. Now, most of them are fully proficient, but the difficulties in the classroom remain. The academic vocabulary requires more in-depth knowledge of the language than that of everyday life. S14, from Pakistan, who attends a master taught in Italian, explains that it is tough for him “because speaking Italian for daily life is one thing and studying or doing research in the Italian language is another. It is different to use a language at a higher level, like technical language, it’s really tough”.

S6 goes through the same difficulty. She attended a short Italian course given by her university when she started her graduation, but she would have liked to do something more helpful. “It wasn’t very good. I think it would be richer to do a really intensive

course. The course I did lasted one month, two or three times a week, for an hour and a half. It passed very fast and I couldn't get all the information". Furthermore, she said she was looking for an advanced Italian course, but when she informed the level she needed everyone said it was too advanced and that she must pay a lot of money in order to do it, otherwise she would not be able to do attend it. According to the interviewees, an advanced Italian course offered by the universities would be a useful benefit not only for those who have international protection but for all international students enrolled in Italian universities, since they face the same obstacle too.

Being in a class with people who do not have the same language level is frustrating for the students, since they feel like they are wasting time.

I've already learnt some Italian vocabulary, grammar, and the alphabet. I was in a course with people who couldn't even read Arabic. I felt like I was just losing time, learning nothing. I did another course, which was good. Short, but good. But, actually, the public courses are not good and they are [taught] in an elementary level. (S6, Personal Communication, May 29, 2018)

Some foreign students feel delayed in comparison to the national students, especially those who are enrolled in courses taught in Italian (some universities offer courses in other languages, like English). S1 has French classes in his bachelor's course to be a cultural mediator. He has never studied it before and he needs it for his job. He says that Italian and French languages are not so different, since they belong to the same neo-Latin family. The situation is: Italian students begin to study French in the school. They are around seven and ten years old when they start studying it. S1 explains that the exams he takes in the university are designed for them, not for him, "a person who is just in the first year of French language studies". Besides, S1 is expected to follow the lectures like all of the other students who have Italian as their mother tongue, instead of as a foreigner with B1 or C1 level of Italian.

We do exams in which we translate texts from Italian to French and from French to Italian. In the place where we do the exams, we can use a 'French-French' dictionary or, let's say, we can use an Italian-Italian dictionary to write answers. But we have just one hour to do it, to translate Italian into French and French into Italian.

The problem is that, sometimes, there are words in the Italian language that I don't know, it's the first time I hear them. To do the translation I have to open my Italian-Italian



dictionary, and I lose a lot of time doing it. Italian students just need time to consult the French-French dictionary. I need more time to consult Italian-Italian first and then French-French, so I don't have enough time, it becomes more difficult. Of course, this is a normal thing for all students who study in foreign countries, but it is a problem. (S1, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

Several international protection holders mentioned believing that mastering the local language is fundamental to understand the culture and customs of the country and that learning Italian is necessary for their adaptation. S1, who lived in other European countries and speaks several languages, explains that “If you go to any country and you want to live in this country, first of all, you have to study their language. If you just wait [for asylum] doing nothing, you are just losing your time”. He also says it is possible to find Italian courses in different places – in basic and intermediate levels. “It is not hard to find it”.

S5 also started to learn Italian as soon as he arrived in the city where he was sent to, after leaving the Sicilian port where he disembarked: “If you go to Italy, do as the Italians do. They go to school, they learn. The way I see, if you want to be integrated into the society you have to speak their language. Otherwise, how will you talk to the people?”. His determination and perseverance are evident:

I told myself that was the only way. I started to attend the courses and I had my dictionary with me. Every now and then I tried to access people and tried to talk to people. Even though sometimes I got rejected I still tried, because it was the only way. That's how it happened, and in the end, I saw I was improving, so I kept pushing harder. After two years I saw myself capable of speaking this language. It's just hard work and dedication.

Some students changed their career paths in order to be easier to study and find jobs in Europe. S1 was an Engineer, but now he studies linguistics and intercultural communication. He says that to be able to study at a PhD level, he has to obtain an Italian diploma first. He wants to do a PhD in International Relations, and it would not be possible to be done with the engineering diploma he had. Thus, he is doing this bachelor to be able to do the PhD he wants. “It is easier for me to study culture mediation than engineering here”.

S3 had a bachelor's degree in Arts, Journalism and English. He is also studying to be a cultural mediator now. He was also a Microsoft certified professional in his country of origin, and this certificate helped him to have an occupation in the refugee reception centre where he lived in southern Italy. The experience he had there led him to the university afterwards.

I am a Microsoft professional, so I have a Microsoft professional certificate and a Microsoft system engineer certificate. Talking to the people from the reception centre, I told them what my job was, what I had studied in Pakistan. Then they said they were testing something to teach information technology to the refugees who were in the centre with me. (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

S3 has been offered a proposal to volunteer and help the centre in this activity. He accepted it immediately. He saw this volunteering position as a way of keeping himself busy while he waited for international protection. "The professor who is in charge of the international students in the university where I study now was in touch with the coordinator of the mediators in the reception centre where I lived at the time". As S3 was volunteering, the coordinator knew him and told the professor about his will to study again.

She [the professor of the university] told this man [the coordinator] that she was going to do something for the foreigners and refugees, and that there might be a possibility to offer scholarships for those who want to study or who have already studied – the ones who wanted to establish themselves in Italy. So, this is how this information came to me. (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

S3 explains that this professor was "trying everything to put the foreigners, the immigrants, to study". At that time there was a short course in immigration studies available and the university suggested him to enrol while he waited for asylum (since he could not enrol in a bachelor before being granted international protection). The professor told him to start this course and said that, meanwhile, the institution would do all the procedure to grant him a government undergraduate scholarship in the future – what really happened one year later.

S4 also heard about the possibility to apply for the scholarship through an acquaintance of the governmental project she was in. "This person helped me to apply for the scholarship because she knew I was willing to study". About the bureaucratic

procedure to apply for the university and to get accepted, S4 says that she was amazed and felt very fortunate, because “she didn’t expect it to be so smooth and simple”. She applied and then she was called for the interview. In the day of the interview, they asked for all the documents that she brought from her country. “They took it and accepted it without any problems, and soon they told me that I was accepted and that I qualified [for the university’s course]”.

In the questionnaire, the students were asked to evaluate how well they were received by the university staff on a scale from 1 to 10 (being 1 very badly and 10 very well). Within the same university, some students felt very welcomed, marking value of 10, and others felt the opposite, marking 2 or 4.

The students who were interviewed gave their opinions on this matter too. It seems that, sometimes, even when they felt welcomed, the institutions were not fully prepared to assist them in providing the information they needed. S4 utters that the reception she had was good, but it could have been better. The situation was totally unknown for her, she did not know where to go or find a home, she had no idea of where she should go to look for answers for all the questions she had at the time. She had to find the place where she lives now by herself, what was tough, and also had to learn everything related to her course alone. A simple orientation in her arrival was likely to have made things easier.

That is what S14 defends as an essential service for international students in all academic institutions. He says that a cultural mediator would have been of extreme help to his adaptation process. Only a few universities, if any, have professionals whose priority is to help foreign students to familiarise themselves with the university. Institutions do have international offices, but they lack staff with the necessary skills to explain essential things to the new students, such as how the assessment system works and how to enrol in the subjects that are available for each course. S14 says it would have been a tremendous benefit to have the guidance of a professional who was qualified not only to improve the dialogue between the student and the institution through language translation, but someone who could explain basic things regarding the Italian higher education system, which is very diverse from those of non-EU countries (in regard to assessments, enrolment periods, teacher-student relations, etc). Now, after more than a year in Italian higher education, S14 understands how the system works and he would like to help other students who are going through the same situation he faced.

The main thing we can learn comes from the interaction with each other. I believe that an information centre is the first thing people need in order to integrate when they come to the university. In this place, there must be people with the capacity to be intercultural mediators or even to point out basic information, like if someone has a short question about how to get admission or how to find a department. It is a big thing to go inside an institution like this, because to do so the person has to know, first of all, where is the place, that the place exists. This person will face other difficulties, such as how to do the exams, to know how to write, to know how to listen. (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018)

As S6 sees, the staff of her university really tries to help, but she thinks the critical problem is on the details missed by the institution. It was tough for her to move from another system of education because she should do many things that she did not know about. She had a tutor nominated by the university when she started her studies, but this person was not of much help. S6 says that it would be essential to have someone to explain at least once all the things foreigners need to know. She had no idea that she should register to do the exams, for example, because in her country she never had to do it. This was very odd for her, and she lost important assessments because of this lack of information.

Just like S14, S6 wants to help the foreign students who are experiencing the same problems she had.

I think that maybe next year, if they give some other scholarships, I could help the new students. I've already told the university that I'm available when the new students want any help or someone to explain things that seem simple to me now but weren't back then. I could help them from my own experience. (S6, Personal Communication, May 29, 2018)

Another current problem is the timing in which the students were informed they were accepted in the universities and received the positive answer regarding the scholarships. Even though everything was settled for the beginning of the academic year, S4, S5 and S6 could only start to attend their courses one month after the lectures had begun. This circumstance put them in a situation of delay in relation to the Italian students. They lost a lot of content from the beginning of the course, and they had a really hard time trying to recuperate it. S5 was frustrated because he missed a lot of lessons and the

material related to it. He talked to his professors to ask what could be done to recover the wasted time, and he says they helped him a lot. He felt assisted and comforted by them.

S4 explains that when she was told she could go to the university, she did not have any place to stay, but the university helped her a lot. The institution was able to look for accommodation for her because it finances the refugees' scholarships by itself.

They really helped us a lot. I never expected it here in Italy, because I was here for a long time already. I didn't have a place to stay after the 6 months [of governmental aid], but the university helped me to find an apartment. They also paid the charges for the utilities and the billing. For the next year they said they will support all refugee scholarship holders with accommodation. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

As for the way students with international protection were received by the Italian scholars, S5 says that they were "more or less" welcoming. He describes himself as "an open door where everyone can enter". He does not consider himself a very talkative person, but he has been able to make friends in Italy anyway, people with who he exchange ideas during the lectures. On the other hand, he calls attention to the difficulties of being an African in Europe and the complexity of becoming part not only of the university but of the Italian society as a whole:

I'm free to say that as Africans we are not usually accepted in society. I'm sorry for saying this, but that is the fact. We are not accepted even as human beings up to a certain point. Coming here is very difficult and you need to prepare to pull yourself up. So, seeing the negative aspect of this Italian society and European society, one has to be well equipped. This means one needs to be prepared to afford any situation, and in order to do so, you have to speak their language. Otherwise, you will not be valued, you will always be underrated. But speaking their language you can be integrated and move to achieve a lot of stuff. So, when I arrived I said: 'look, the first thing is education because my life is all about education. I need to learn'. (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018)

Language presents itself as an obstacle for integration once again, this time in the speech of S4. At first, she felt more integrated with other foreign students than with the natives. She attends an international course in which both immigrant and national students

are present. For her, it was difficult to track with the natives because they were speaking Italian most of the time. In the beginning, S4 did not find it easy to interact with them, but she says they are good friends now, even though she still feels more integrated among the international students.

S14 also testified to often find himself in the situation of not understanding a significant part of his Italian colleagues' conversations. He did not feel integrated into the class or the university, but his case is proof that the goodwill of the institutions' staff can change the lives of the students. His professor of Comparative Constitution approached him and suggested that, since he is a student from outside of Italy, he should tell his experience to his classmates, present himself. Hence, this professor conceded the time of one of his lessons to S14, who gave a lecture to his colleagues about his culture, his religion and other things he considered important.

It made a very positive image of me in my class, my colleagues appreciated it very much. That was a nice experience for me, it opened many paths for integration with other people and even to be integrated into the university. The best of it is that now I am collaborating with the university.  
(S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018)

When asked if he feels integrated now, S14 states that it is still challenging, but he can say he is part of the university. He highlights that the whole system is very different from the Pakistani, so it is barely impossible to understand in one or two years how the university really works. Different from the education system in his country of origin, in Italy the students must be online every day. However, he does not have the possibility of being online very often – either for not having an internet connection or due to work and other activities that constrain him from having the time to do it. Therefore, he has already missed important information many times regarding his lectures and the tests' dates. While in Pakistan exams take place only twice a year, in Italy there are many possibilities to do them according to the students' own needs. However, to be able to use this benefit, the students must access the university's website on a daily basis.

The age might also be an element that approaches or disconnects foreign and native students. S6 utters that it was difficult for her to socialise with the Italians because in her age she should already be graduated. She has done almost four years of her undergraduate studies in Syria but had to restart from the first year in Italy. After the university evaluated her previous achievements in the Syrian university, she was placed

in the second academic year of the course in Italy. She thinks it helped, but at the same time it was confusing because she started the first year, then she was sent to the second, and then her classmates changed again, thus it was a messy experience. If she had her previous exams evaluated by the university in the first place, she would probably have started from the second year and this feeling of unsuitability would be softer.

There are also those who had less difficult experiences regarding integration. S3, for instance, sees himself as an important asset to the university and sustains the point of view that if one is willing to fit in, sooner or later he or she is going to be accepted by everybody. He thinks the problem stands “when you think that everybody should come to you because it will never happen”. S3 is an extremely resilient person and, in his own words, approaching to people is “like a job or like food: food will never come to you, you have to go and look for it. Whatever you search in this world, you will obtain it, good or bad” (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

S2 considers herself welcomed by the native students too. Besides her Italian friends, she states there are many other international students in the university and they get along very well. “There are always people coming and going through the Erasmus programme. Even last semester there was a student from Spain, he came to study Arabic, which is my mother tongue, through the Erasmus programme” (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

As for the students who answered the questionnaire, they were asked once again to choose a value between 1 and 10 regarding how good was the receptivity they had from the university staff and the Italian students (being 1 very badly and 10 very well). They were also questioned about the how integrated they feel to the universities (being 1 not integrated and 10 very integrated). The chart below [Figure 7] demonstrates the average of their answers, based on the sum of the values attributed by each of them for each question shared by nine (the number of students who answered).

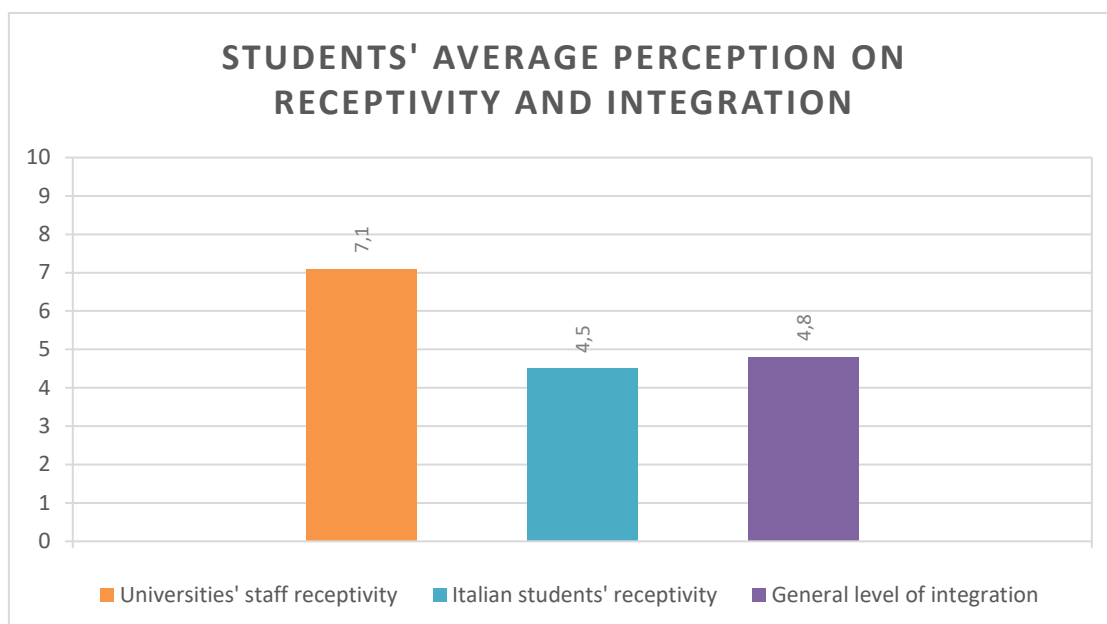


Figure 7. Student's average perception on receptivity and integration  
Source: author's elaboration, 2018.

#### IV.2.c. Conciliating work and studies

As it has been briefly mentioned in the “Language barrier” subchapter, some of the students ended up choosing courses that belong to areas which are diverse from those they studied in their home countries. This choice has been led by diverse reasons: some had the aim of finding jobs easily, others had to adapt because the universities did not offer courses in the areas they had studied previously, and there are even those who preferred to study in English – and since the offer of courses in English is much lower than that in Italian, they gave up on keeping the subjects they were familiar with in order to study in a language that they mastered.

In the case of S6, who studies languages, she would have liked to find a course more concentrated in Italian, English and Arabic. It would have been easier for her, since she already spoke English, Arabic is her mother tongue, and she was learning Italian very fast while living in the country. However, there were no Arabic or exclusively Italian and English courses at the university she applied for. Furthermore, she did not find any other scholarships, and that is why she opted to study French and Spanish, even knowing that it would be quite difficult for her. She was determined to go back to university no matter what it would take.

S2, who also study languages, was able to find a scholarship for a course that offers English, Arabic and Italian, but she had to adapt somehow. She obtained a four-



year bachelor's degree in English Literature at a university in southern Yemen. She worked as a teacher for eight years in a public school teaching students from the primary, intermediate and secondary school. Her career was very education-driven. Now she is attending a Linguistics and Intercultural Communication course in Italy, despite her previous long teaching career. She points out that the current course is a little bit different from her first degree, because it focuses on languages, translation and mediation in the communication area, instead of education.

S2 had the possibility of obtaining the recognition of nearly 70% of the subjects she studied in her country, that is, what she studied before was considered equivalent to Italy's degree. She could skip 122 credits of the Italian course due to her Yemeni bachelor, so she was put directly in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Still, she has to attend some lectures from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years, what she considers complicated because she is studying everything in parallel, what can be exhausting and even confusing.

According to S4, who holds a university's financial aid, there were only three master courses available in the scholarship announcement, of which two were in English. As she did not speak enough Italian, she had to choose between both of them. It was actually one main course with two options of specialization. She picked green economy, and she is happy with her choice, since it does not differ too much from her former career.

S1, who has a degree in Engineering, is preparing to become a culture mediator now. This is a significant change for him, but this is what it takes for him to have the possibility of studying at a PhD level. Now, he wants to pursue a career in International Relations, and it would not be possible with the Engineering bachelor.

In a similar situation, S3 also had a bachelor's degree in a different domain and now he studies languages and communication. He says he had already been thinking of learning many idioms because he has always loved the Spanish language. He already spoke English and he thought that if he also learnt Italian, he would be able to talk to a significant share of the world's population.

I can communicate in English, so maybe half of the world's population speak this language. Then, Spanish, 30 or 40%. Italian and Spanish languages are so similar... So, why would I miss the opportunity of speaking with more people? Then, I thought that if I learnt the French language I could talk to people from many places in Africa and also with French

people. And it also remains the part that speaks Arabic. I belong to the Arab culture because I'm from Pakistan. So, considering everything, maybe I can communicate with 90% of the world. I had in mind why choosing this course: it will help me in my work as a cultural mediator and it corresponds to what I wanted. (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

S5 had not started higher education studies in the Gambia. He was too young and fled the country right after finishing high school. He says the course he has chosen in Italy exactly fits to what he wanted. What he planned was Economics and Management, and that was available in the university where he applied for the scholarship. "I didn't have to adapt to anything, the course was there for me" (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018).

Most of the students said the value of the scholarship – which is, on average, 4800 € per year per student – is not enough to cover their living costs. As mentioned previously, the resources destined for the scholarships provided by the Ministero dell'Interno along with the CRUI are made available for the students only as services, so the students are not given any pocket money at all. In the case of ADISU's scholarships, part of the value is provided directly to the students' bank accounts. This is precisely the reason why some students prefer the aid funded by the latter source: they have more autonomy to manage their expenses.

Those who receive the scholarships as services usually live at the universities' residences and receive a credit for meals in the institutions' canteens. However, without cash, they cannot afford to buy basic hygiene products or do simple everyday things. Transportation costs are not covered by the scholarship either, and some of the interviewees reported that the books required for their studies are, every now and then, not available in the universities' libraries, so they need money to buy them too. For these reasons, those who receive the scholarships exclusively as services have no choice but to work while studying full-time.

It is indeed complicated for the international protection beneficiaries to conciliate the studies with their jobs. On the other hand, most of them are, if not working, looking for a job or planning to do it in the near future. The standpoint of the Ministero dell'Interno is that Italian students often need to work during graduation, and therefore

there is no reason why it should be different with the foreign students. “Across OECD<sup>21</sup> and partner countries, 53% of 18-24-year-olds are studying. Most of these young students are only studying, but across countries, 17% of them combine education and employment” (OECD, 2018). In Italy, however, the share of those who study and work simultaneously is less than 3%.

One of the explanations for this scenario is that Italy is among the EU countries which were severely hit by the last economic crisis and has not yet recovered. In this country, one in every three foreign-born 15-29-year-olds are unemployed and out of the education system. It is true that there is also a high share of natives who undergo the same situation, but to a much lower extent than those who were born elsewhere. In Italy, 12% of the people between 15 and 29 years old was born abroad. The employment rates of native-born and foreign-born adults vary depending on the age of the immigrants at the time of their arrival [Figure 8] (OECD, 2018).

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<sup>21</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

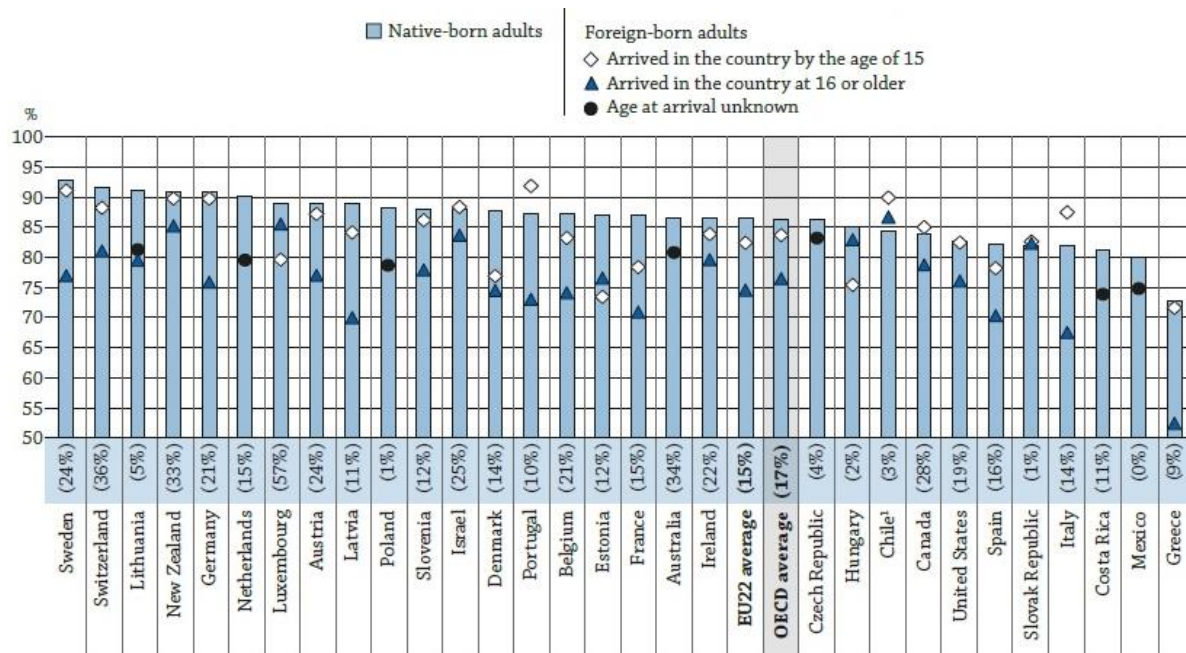


Figure 8. Employment rates of native- and foreign-born 25-64 year-olds with tertiary education, by age at arrival in the country (2017)

Note: The percentage in parentheses represents the share of foreign-born adults among 25-64 year-olds.

1. Year of reference differs from 2017. Refer to the source table for details.

Countries are ranked in descending order of the employment rate of tertiary-educated native-born adults.

Source: OECD/ILO (2018), Table A3.4. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-36-en>).

StatLink: <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933802114>

The sort of comparison sustained by the Ministero dell'Interno between national and refugee students regarding work is not adequate for several reasons. Firstly, the natives who work do not have to experience the same arduous adaptation that the international protection beneficiaries must endure. The latter have to deal with the language barrier, the understanding of the education system, the new culture and the fragile psychological situation in which they often find themselves due to the traumas that led them to leave their countries. Furthermore, they are often alone, without a family to lean on, and facing a prejudice that recurrently prevents them from entering the labour market despite their professional capacity.

Refugees need more assistance than Italian students. A scholarship of a value that would allow them to only study – at least in the first year of the course, which is the most critical for adaptation – would be of the utmost importance so these students could take better advantage of the opportunity to access higher education. Many of them achieve academic and professional success in spite of all the difficulties, but if the points

mentioned were improved, the success could be higher, or at least the path for graduation would be a little easier, since these students have already gone through extreme situations.

S1 says he is trying to manage his job and his studies, but he finds it very difficult. For the second consecutive year, he achieved the 60 credits he needed to renew his scholarship. Thus, his financial aid for the third – and probably last – year of bachelor's is guaranteed. He explains that, right now, his job comes first place in his priorities' list, being more important than the university. He already works in his area of studies and says he will do his best to go more often to the university, since he has some free time in his work schedule this year.

In the case of S2, what bothered her the most was her difficulty to get a job in Italy.

In my country, I used to work. I didn't have any difficulties [to find a job] because I think I was lucky, because I speak English and Arabic. It qualifies me to find good jobs even with NGOs. I worked with Save the Children, Oxfam International, and also at the Triangle French Organisation with Somali refugees in Yemen. [...] I'm used to working, I'm not a woman who sits at home. My husband was working and helped me, but I wanted to feel independent. It is difficult here to find a job, very difficult, especially for foreigners. Even Italians have problems [to find jobs], but we are a 'double-double' problem. If you want to work here, you will only find jobs like babysitting, caregiving or cleaning houses. I worked as a caregiver for a while, but I wanted to work in my area. (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

After a long time of searching, S2 was hired to work with the International Organization for Migrations (IOM) in Sicily. She applied for a Cultural Mediator position, and since she was speaking 'enough' Italian at the time, she was hired. Her main duty was to do the translations between doctors and refugee patients as soon as they landed in the Sicilian ports.

S3 says it is "definitely" hard for him to conciliate working and studying at the same time, but not working is out of the question. His scholarship only provides services, but he says to believe that this year the Government is going to "change something". S3

is supposed to have classes every day but, since he is working, he ends up missing some of them. In spite of that, he thinks he follows the classes just like the national students.

At the time of the interview, S3 had a part-time job, but he was offered another position to work at the IOM (International Organization for Migration). He was preparing himself to go with the IOM on a mission at the beginning of May. This new job is full-time, and he might need to move to another city. When asked how he would finish the studies if he had to move from the town where his university is, S3 explained that

it is important to do the exams, but you can study from distance. It will be difficult, it is already difficult right now that I have a part-time job. I work 50 kilometres from where I currently live. I spend two or three hours to come and go every day, and it is a six-hour a day job. So, it's a big problem for me to study and work together. It will be hard to study and work 40 hours per week, but let's hope for the best. (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

Some students who have scholarships that are diverse from those of Ministero dell'Interno / CRUI prefer to keep trying to manage their incomes without working. This is possible mainly because their financial aid is provided by the university, so they can ask for help directly to the staff if they are struggling with some specific expenses.

This is the situation of S4, who says she is trying her very best to manage the money.

People like me don't count on the usual family background. When I left the [refugees'] camp I did not have a lot of resources, I didn't even have a laptop to take to the university. Despite that, I made it to manage my studies and to be in the same level as the other students, using technology or getting wi-fi for myself, or books, for example. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

S4 says it is tough to do this financial management, but it is fine for now, since she is able to do it. S4 would like to work, but she is concerned about the pressure she is going to face in her second year of studies: "I would like to work in flexible hours because I have to work according to my needs. This is what I expect. I have lectures in the morning and evening, so it will not be easy to manage the working hours with the studying hours".

S5 started his full-time studies in the 2017/2018 academic year. His scholarship is the same as S4, funded by the university, and he says he is definitely going to look for a job later on, because now is not the right time. He says he knows it will be hard to study and work, since he has lessons every day and believes that working full-time he will not be able to attend most lessons. When asked about the value of the scholarship, S5 says it is possible to live only with the aid's value for a period of time.

If your expenditures are high, you can't be accommodated in the house they give. In a certain point, you need to do something about yourself. If you try to be economic, maybe you can live without working for a little bit. But, anyway, something has to be done, you will need to work. (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018)

This research found the universities' autonomy to administrate the scholarships a tremendous asset for the students. The Government is an apparently distant and maybe even inaccessible source, which cannot be easily reached if there are urgent matters to be dealt with, but when the universities', which are in contact with the students on daily basis, are able to help, some issues can be solved more efficiently.

S6 says the value of the scholarship is quite little, but the university was "very generous" last year and paid for her accommodation, which was not included on the benefits, so the institution paid for it apart. "This helped me a lot, since the rent is the most expensive thing. Otherwise, it would have been much more difficult".

This year, S6 is paying for her own accommodation with the money provided by the scholarship. She says she intends to work, but it is going to be difficult: "I'm studying many languages and I prefer to concentrate on all these languages right now. Otherwise, it would be hard to conciliate [work and studies], because I spend much more time than my colleagues to study the subjects, since I need to translate it more than once, slowly". She faces the same problem referred by S1, who has to search for the words he does not know in Italian and then translate them to English or French, which are the languages she studies.

S14 feels fortunate to have a job because not every person has this opportunity. He highlights it would be a good thing if there were more job vacancies and if the students with international protection could get complete support. "If the university can give a scholarship to one student, it can give to five". He also thinks they should provide

financial aid not only for those who want to study “more general fields”, but also technical fields. He has a full-time job and attends a full-time course at the university. His scholarship is the Ministero dell’Interno / CRUI, and he gave an example to explain how he sometimes struggles when he needs the university to adapt the scholarship for his needs:

“I have my personal internet wi-fi connection because the university apartment lacks it. In other structures of the university they have internet, but in my apartment, there isn’t. I asked the administration many times, but they said it is not possible [to help]”.

He said he had no choice but to hire a personal internet service. He must be up to date with his professors and his lectures’ time, and for that, he has to update the university website and his e-mail very often, and through the mobile phone, it is not possible to do it.

This is a difficulty, and for these things, it would be good to have pocket money. Even for transport and books too. We cannot find all the books in the university library. This was the big issue that I was facing regarding my studies. These are the main problems that still don’t have any kind of solution in the CRUI scholarship. (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018)

It has been identified a pattern on the answers of the students who addressed to the working and studying matter on the questionnaire. Only one of them reported not having the need to work in order to pay for his expenses or send money to the family in his country of origin. Among the other eight students who need to work, three are employed in their area of studies, four have jobs that are not related to their courses and one is unemployed and having a hard time looking for a job. Those who work in their fields of study answered it was hard to find a job, and when asked to classify how hard it is for them to conciliate working and studying in a scale from 0 to 10, being 0 very easy and 10 very hard, they marked the highest scores of difficulty: two students answered 10 and one answered 9.

Among the four students who do not work in the domain they are studying, all said it was not hard to find jobs. Only one marked a high score (10) in the level of difficulty to manage work and studies, while the others classified it between 5 and 6.



According to these results, it is possible to conclude that those who work in their areas of studies have a harder time conciliating their jobs and their academic lives than those who do not work on jobs related to their studies. This might occur because those who have already started their professional careers are trying to be excellent on both studies and work, while the others just need to keep their jobs to pay for expenses. The latter do not have the pressure to make a career of their jobs yet, so they can concentrate more on their courses.

#### IV.2.d. Life changing experiences and future plans

The opportunity to get a degree is life-changing. All the students agree with that. The important thing to know then is how exactly they expect it to change their lives. Some want to pursue higher-level academic studies, such as masters and PhDs, others want to build their careers based on their own experiences as refugees with the aim to support asylum claimants, like they once were.

Always in your life, you have to be moving on. You cannot stop in one place, you have to find something new. Each day we are studying new things. This is life. What you are doing gives you the possibility to make your life better.  
(S1, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

S1's intention is to further his studies to the PhD level and to stay in Italy afterwards. On the other hand, he says that all depends on "what will happen tomorrow". He is currently applying to study as an exchange student in Germany, but going there hinges on having or not having a job.

If I can't find a job in Germany, I won't leave the one I have here in Italy to go there. I would like to live there for a while because the German language is more important for Europe than the other languages. Germany controls the economy of Europe now. The French language is also important for my job because I work with the refugees. I work with the people who arrived from Africa, and they do not speak German, they speak other languages, like French. What I want to do is to improve my skills in the languages I don't know very well, like French and German, for my job. So, that's why

I would like to go to a German city in the border with France.  
(S1, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

For S2, having the possibility to study again have already changed her life. She feels like rediscovering herself. She wishes to stay in Italy after graduating, and the only thing that could stop her from doing that is not finding a job. In this case, she would look for available positions in other European countries, but it is really not what she intends to do.

When you meet new people, new ideas, new information... All of it helps you to see life from an angle you haven't seen before. It gives a brain streaming for your mind. You think new things, you get new thoughts. This is what is happening to me. (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

For many interviewees', helping foreigners who are in need of assistance due to the same problems they had when arriving in Europe is in the centre of their concerns. S3 completed a master course in immigration studies prior to starting another undergraduate degree – this time to be a cultural mediator. Soon after finishing the master's, he was offered three different job positions in the immigration field. One of the employers even wanted to send him to Greece, since he speaks the Greek language as well.

For now, S3 is well established in Italy and wishes to stay in the country. He is very focused on studying and working, and adds that if one has a job and feels like integrating into the society, there is no reason to leave. However, he does not want to shut the door to other opportunities: "It all depends on the future. I don't know the future, but I believe in destiny. Wherever destiny takes me, I will go".

All of them agree that studying is the best chance they have to stay in Europe and succeed as professionals. S4 sees it also as an opportunity to "change this title of 'refugee' that I have got". Now that she is a student, she feels more integrated into society. Before enrolling in the university she felt "always as an outsider".

Obtaining a degree from a European university is also considered by the international protection holders a chance to raise their probabilities of being hired in Italy. It also helps them to prepare the ground for further studies in higher levels, such as PhD. Some already had bachelors' degrees – obtained in their countries of origin – but they were never offered jobs in Italy in the field they had studied.

Even though my degree was based on the European credit system, it was from Afghanistan, so it was never given too much credibility. It was not enough for me to get a job here. I could get a job in a restaurant or as a waitress somewhere, but now, obtaining this [European] degree, there is hope for me to get a job within organisations where I'm able to do a work that needs the specific skills I have. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

Once again, getting a job is the only “if” of a student’s decision whether to stay in Italy or not. S4 says she loves the country, and if she starts working in her area and the income is sufficient to live, then she wants to stay. There are even those who are more optimistic and have no doubts that success will come either way. S5 says he must be self-confident because he perceives it as the best way of preparing himself for the job market. In addition, Italy is a second home for him, so he has no intention to leave.

S6 believes that if she did not have this scholarship, she would not be able to study anymore, since the best courses are costly – those which, according to her, really gives the opportunity to be hired for a good job. She thinks that even if she did some kind of vocational training, the job problem would not be solved. Besides, she always preferred to study in universities – in her country of origin too – since she has an academic-driven profile. She aims to continue studying to master and then PhD level. Also, she wants to remain in Italy because she likes the kindness of the people and her whole family is there. They could flee together, and even though she had to move to study in a different region from that where her parents and sister live, they can see each other now and then.

For S14, there is a short answer for the ‘how living and studying in Europe changed his life’ question: “Every big thing that happens in our lives has some kind of impact – positive or negative. There is always something new and something we leave behind”. That is precisely what these students’ lives are about. They left a lot behind but were strong enough to open their hearts and minds for the unknown once again. “I am happy because I am one of the lucky people who get this opportunity of studying and who can profit from it. I hope it will be an outstanding experience and a very good thing for me” (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018).

#### IV.2.e. Improving academic experience and access for all

Considering the varied cultural background of the international protection beneficiaries and their open-mindedness, one of the recurrent suggestions they gave not only for improving their experiences but also the experiences of all students – including the Italians – is to provide the students with the possibility to participate on exchange programmes abroad. Especially those who study languages would benefit a lot from this opportunity. Many universities give this possibility to apply for a semester in another European country funded by the Erasmus programme. In order to do this exchange, the students need financial help from their families though, since the financial support given for those who are granted a place is tiny. The students say it would be impossible to live in a foreign country just with the amount of money awarded by this project.

Other students share the opinion that the improvement of their experiences within the universities depends more on themselves than anyone else. Only going to the lectures is not enough. They say they should work hard to reach good results, and they are eager to do it. “The professor explains [the content] in the lecture, but then it's up to you. When he finishes, you start” (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

They think they could dedicate more time to study if they did not have to work, but even though having more time to study, this is not what all of them intend to do. S3, for instance, is very concentrated in the selection process of a job he applied for, and he does not wish to stop working. This new job he is seeking is in his area of studies, so it would also give him the chance to practice what he learns in class.

S4 had a serious problem at the beginning of her course which was very time-consuming. She started her first semester at the end of October – almost two months after the classes started – due to the delay on her selection procedure. She says it would have been much more valuable for her to start the course from its very beginning, so she would not have missed so many lectures and probably would not have to struggle as much as she did in the first year. Starting late affected her grades in the first semester, and in her opinion, there was no reason for such delay on the selection procedure. She felt really harmed by this situation, but she says it is simple to avoid the repetition of this mistake in the next year. She suggests that the selection procedure should be done earlier, before the beginning of the classes, then any of the students are going to lose two months of classes again.

Once again, the students mentioned lack of information as one of the main problems within the institutions. Many of them say it would have been a lot better if they had been introduced to information sources that could explain where to look for lectures' schedules and contents, details about the courses and subjects they would study, exams structure, suggestions on the credits they can apply for in each semester and so on. Most of them did not have anyone to give them this sort of explanation.

Even after more than a year enrolled in the university, S4 says she still needs help from the staff and she would like to have this kind of suggestions and information, she sustains that she needs guidance. "It is not always the student who has to run after and struggle to find guidance. The university should make all these things available from the very beginning, so we wouldn't be in a lost situation of struggling to obtain all the information" (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018).

The students also shared their thoughts on how to make the ground easier for other beneficiaries of international protection to access higher education in Italy. They say the situation of the refugees in Italy is different from the rest of Europe or even from non-European countries. From the moment they receive the positive response that they were granted the permit to stay in the country, there is no time for celebration. Instead, they have to start worrying about what to do next, since they will just have the support of the government during six months from the day they are granted asylum. Therefore, most of them do not have real peace of mind to think about studies.

Everybody rushes to find a job, to save their lives, to live – battling to avoid staying in the streets, sitting in stations or having to live in the streets begging for money in order to buy food. But the first necessities of life comes first and education comes second. If refugees are not provided with the very basics to live, of course, nobody is going to think about education. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

Another idea commonly suggested was to raise the number of scholarship opportunities for international protection holders. They consider this chance they have of studying very important, and not only the government and the educational institutions themselves can provide financial aid, but also the private sector – as already happens with some of the sponsorships referred to in this study. The students highlight the vast potential of increasing the number of scholarships available if the private sector was more

encouraged to take part in this cause. They reinforce it would be highly appreciated if there were more places available for the refugees in the universities, and the whole society could benefit from it.

We have a bunch of people out there who are willing to continue their studies, but the problem is that they don't have funds to do it, and maybe they don't fulfil other requirements. [...] The requirements for the scholarships are sometimes hard, they only accept those who have political asylum. Those who have humanitarian protection are also willing to study, but the scholarships are only for refugee status and subsidiary protection. So, I think it should be for all, for everyone. (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018)

The lack of documents is an issue that can also be handled with the goodwill of university staff and CIMEA's work. Not all of the refugees who go to Italy are able to take their documents with them – many lose everything in the journey. In this case, alternatives given by the university in order to evaluate their levels of education would be very useful. Some higher education institutions already accept digitalized documents or apply some kind of assessment tests, so the students can classify their academic level according to the Italian parameters and know for what courses they can apply for. The work developed by those institutions is the proof that it can be done, and that it actually works fine for both institutions and students.

It would be interesting if a person who has already done a master course could obtain the equivalence of the credits, so he or she would be able to enrol in a PhD course, for example. Sometimes the grading system of particular countries does not match with the European grade system. For these situations, the students propose that universities create exceptional regulations for those who are coming from African or Asian countries, for example.

Providing information about the scholarships in many languages would also be very helpful for those who are looking for this kind of opportunities. S6 said it was quite difficult for her to find internet pages that provided guidance regarding scholarships in another language than Italian. "My sister is looking for scholarships too right now, and she finds quite difficult to look for it in Italian. I think it could be a good idea providing the scholarships on the internet also in some foreign languages" (S6, Personal Communication, May 29, 2018).

Providing Italian courses was mentioned as an important improvement too, especially on higher levels, since the difficulty of many students is improve their Italian skills on an academic level – since they already have a broad knowledge of the language to use it in ordinary situations of daily life.

The incompleteness of the scholarships could also be fixed by more investment from the private sector, that could make more capital available for the scholars. S14 highlights that studying in a university is like a full-time job, it is not something that can be done if one has to sustain him/herself.

First of all, we need to understand the situation of the people who have international protection: they are refugees, and it means they have a very big reason behind their escape. They will not have support from family, friends or somebody else. If they are here, they need to be able to take care of their studies. If their concentration is divided between the studies and how to find a place to live, how to find internet access, concerns about food and other basic needs... If the person is worried about these things and is trying to find a solution, these basic problems create big obstacles for this person to go further and to do his best in the studies. On top of these worries, there is the lack of information. (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018)

Lastly, S14 wished there was an exchange between the students. “That would be a better thing because we would be able to know each other, and we could learn from each other” (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018). He would like to see it happening not only in technical fields but also in social fields or even in arts, since he believes it would allow the “breaking of stereotypes”.

#### IV.2.f. Being a refugee and dreaming of home

Encouraging family and friends to follow the same path they did and apply for asylum in Europe is not something that the majority of refugees would do, but the recommendation to find other ways of beginning a new life is. S1 would advise family members and friends of his to go to Italy as international students. S2 has the same opinion: she would recommend it to those who have been granted scholarships from the

very beginning, that is, prior to leaving the country of origin. For anyone who is in a position other than that, she strongly discourages, unless they are “strong enough”.

I don't recommend [asking for asylum in Italy] because they will be in trouble. They will have a lot of problems. It is not easy. I am lucky because I have a bachelor, I have higher education, I speak languages and I am young enough. But here life is difficult if you want to start working. I don't recommend it because I don't want them to suffer. Italy is a beautiful country, maybe the most beautiful country in the world, I love it. However, there is an economic crisis here, particularly in the south. Maybe it is a little better in the north, but, for me... I cannot move anymore. I'm settled here. (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018)

There are even examples of people who managed to apply as international students and get a scholarship. S5 has a friend who applied from Africa and it worked fine, but he advised the person not to take the same path he took.

S4 says there are good opportunities and good universities in Italy, but the main problem is the language barrier. Many universities do not have courses in English, only Italian. Thus, for this reason, she does not recommend international students to apply for Italian universities.

If a person is willing to go for the studies, to higher education, it's better to study somewhere where there is a language with which they are more comfortable, like an English speaking country. Here [in Italy], though there is a 3-year course, it is too difficult to live if you don't know the language. Speaking English is not enough, we must speak Italian. (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018)

For those who want to seek asylum, S4 says “of course I would not recommend”. She thinks Italy is much better than many other countries that are deporting refugees, especially those that never welcome or accept them, like Norway. She says this is one of the worst countries for a refugee to be. In her opinion, Italy has been outstanding welcoming people. Living in Italy she does not feel like a refugee, but there are still a lot of problems to be dealt with. According to her, there is no stability, she never knows how the future is going to be. “Establishing the life from zero in Italy is very tough, it is a hard life, especially when the circumstances are not favourable. In this case, some important



things are hard to achieve, like having a job” (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018).

S6 would also suggest her friends and family to go to another country. As she sees, she was fortunate to get the scholarship and, even though it was quite difficult, it was still easier than for many others. “I can see my sister now and other students, it is quite difficult. Also because my sister is already graduated, she gave lectures for five years. Here she can’t teach, and even if she gets a scholarship she will need to study for four or five years” (S6, Personal Communication, May 29, 2018). S6 explains that her sister would have to do everything again, even already having a degree. That is why she recommends people to go to other countries. “I have some friends living in other countries. They started [their studies] from where they had stopped. My friends were already graduated and they had just to do some exams, some tests, to continue to higher studies, like masters or PhD” (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018).

On the other hand, S3 affirms he would recommend not just for his family, but for every person in the world to seek a better future and better possibilities, even if it meant to face the same challenges he did. “They don’t need to lock themselves in a box. If there is no opportunity, they have to strive, they have to get out from their homes, wherever they are, to look for the opportunity and grab it” (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

A common wish among most of the interviewees and those who answered the questionnaire is to return home, either to visit or to live. Being away with no option but to keep the distance is harsh. The following paragraphs verbalize the immigrants’ desires.

“Of course I would like to visit if the situation there got better, but I don’t think it will. I hope so though. Nobody wants to leave his own country” (S1, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

“I want to see my family, to visit, to see my father and mother, my sisters. I’m praying to God for this because I want to see them, I’m missing them so much” (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

“Of course, my family is there. My father, my mother, my brothers, so... Definitely, yes” (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

“I miss my place. I love my country because I have my whole life there, my background. Even though I’m young, I had very nice days there. I would also love to go because my father’s grave is there. I miss him and I want to visit, but I can’t. It is not possible for now” (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018).

“There is no place like home. Due to some circumstances, I cannot go back there, because according to the asylum [rules] I cannot go back in any way. It is absolutely out of question. I cannot go there. If other than that I would love to, because it is my home. I miss home” (S5, Personal Communication, May 24, 2018).

“Yeah, I do miss Syria a lot. I would like to go to visit. Now I can’t, not until I get my Italian nationality, to which I can apply three years from now. But, yeah, I would like to go there to visit. To live I don’t think so, because it was quite difficult starting all over again here. So, returning there would be the same, but even more difficult because it would be my home country feeling like a new place” (S6, Personal Communication, May 29, 2018).

#### IV.2.g. Final requests and considerations from the students

The purpose of this chapter is to allow the students to speak up about any topic they consider important to highlight in this study. It is also an open space to add any final considerations or requests they might have.

However, before presenting their wishes, one of their requests was to use this platform to introduce a project called Università Popolare di Interazione, that promotes different kinds of workshops based on local languages of South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and South America. Besides, it presents religions and cultures through lectures and conversations organised by professionals and researchers of the abovementioned places. The participants of these workshops would be university students, professors, school teachers, lawyers, administration officials, officials from law and order institutions, researchers and people who are interested to work in the respective regions. The whole idea is based on encouraging and empowering people to show what they can give to the society, that is, their cultural capital. This project aims at breaking stereotypes and enriching the learning and the knowledge of the society where they are now.

The paragraphs below contain the wishes, acknowledgements and other final considerations of the students.

“I want the international community to help women in my country, to give more opportunities for women because women are creating peace in the world. Now we don't have peace in our countries, the third world countries. Why there is no peace? Because women don't have any rights. Women are the creators of peace because they are mothers, lovers, sisters, aunts. They are a dynamo for love. I am saying this to everybody because I believe it. So, just help women with projects, anything that will enlighten them, and you will see that peace will sprint. [...] European countries have to help women in third countries, in poor countries, to make it better for women there, and then peace will start. Where there is no love, no peace. Please, share my request” (S2, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

“I want to thank my professors and the coordinator of the mediators in the reception centre, they have always supported me. I think they should keep advising people as they did to me, they should do it with more and more. There are other guys who are like me and they want to study, want to do something, to establish themselves. So, this work should continue being done. Right now I am not in the position of helping someone, but I can share my personal experience with all of those who have recently arrived. I do not want to force anyone to do anything. All I can do is share my experience saying that ‘I did this, if you think you have something better to do for yourself, do it. You can do as I did, you can change, you can do whatever you think it's better for you’. This is my advice to them. And wish to live, always. The devotion, the motivation... They should never lose the motivation to live. This is my advice to everyone” (S3, Personal Communication, April 23, 2018).

“I want to add that making the ground easier for the refugees to get into the universities or maybe into the high school is one of the best solutions for the integration process. As refugees are coming, and we have the ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe, they are always known as those who create problems in the countries, especially in countries like Italy or eastern Europe. Usually, they are not known for the good things, but for the negative image that the native people of the countries have of them. So, the best thing for integration is to let them access education. It would be like a proof to the natives that they [the refugees] are ordinary people like them, who can study like them, who can be a part

of the community, who can be useful. Tomorrow they will be graduated, they can work and they can contribute to the society in their own way” (S4, Personal Communication, May 23, 2018).

“If I left my country is because I was forced to do it. Even here [in Italy] there are some things that can deduct your liberty and your opinion. The problem is that people want us to integrate into the society becoming one of them. That doesn’t mean integration, that means transformation. The situation is: If I am good enough to accept you, to welcome you, that means I’m accepting you with your differences. If I force you to change and become like me, then what is integration and what is welcoming and what are all these things? The whole concept is dead in this case.

Before we were talking about one phenomenon, which is forced immigration. But here we have also experienced another thing: forced integration. ‘I like you too much, but I like you if you are like me’. So, to understand this phenomenon, you will see very few people willing to talk about it, very few people will tell you that what is being done is a very good thing in a very bad way, and that the causes and the objectives of the very good thing are being spoiled. This is not a welcoming” (S14, Personal Communication, June 23, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

This research was challenging since its very beginning. First, because of the nature of the topic, which required sensibility to deal with the interviewed students – who sometimes felt uncomfortable to share personal and delicate matters with a total stranger. It was also demanding to interpret the speech of university staff members, who could be honest about the positive and negative aspects of the work developed by the institutions or take a defensive posture, trying to justify the weaknesses of the system.

Secondly, due to the need of going to Italy to enable face-to-face contact with the interviewees and to participate of important events on this topic, such as the staff training week held by the inHERE (Higher Education Supporting Refugees in Europe) project that took place at Sapienza University in Rome.

I also attended the research seminar *“Tackling the migration and refugee challenge. Exploring innovative policies and practices through the lens of social enterprises and third sector organizations”*, held by the EMPOWER-SE Action and funded by the COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology), in which I had the chance to present this research and its findings.

While trying to reach the interviewees in an earlier phase of the research, I realised that if I did not go to Italy to reach the students and institutions, I would not be able to understand the whole picture of the country’s situation regarding its higher education system. Besides, I would never fully understand the difficulties faced by the refugee students and the staff of the universities. It is such a big challenge to turn universities into more inclusive environments.

Even though I was able to interview a satisfactory number of people by the end of the research, I had difficulties to get in touch with the professors of the universities and coordinators of the international offices. Consequently, it was hard to reach students, since their contacts were enabled mainly by the employees of the higher education institutions. Despite months of effort trying to obtain responses, a high number of universities did not answer my request. However, the eight universities that collaborated – either facilitating interviews with their staff and students or sharing the questionnaires with them – made this research possible. The staff members who contributed were really engaged in the mission of enabling the access of international protection holders to the Italian higher education system, even with all of the difficulties they face to do it.

The language was another challenge. All the refugee students who were interviewed speak English – among other idioms – but some staff members from the universities did not. Besides, there were several important research materials available only in Italian. I did not speak Italian at all, so I enrolled in the government's Italian language course, the same offered for the asylum-seekers who live in refugee camps across the country. What I learnt in a two-month intensive course was enough to get a satisfactory level of reading and listening skills, so I was able to interview the staff members in Italian and to understand the content of the materials written in this language.

I was only capable of developing my skills at this level because my mother tongue is Portuguese, a Latin-based language which has many similarities to Italian. This is not the case of most refugees who very often come from countries where the spoken languages have diverse origins, such as Arabic, Farsi, Bangla, Bambara, Somali and so on. Even with all the similarities, it was hard for me to learn, and talking to native Italians remains a challenge. However, the need to learn led me to experience part of the difficulties that asylum-seekers face regarding the language when they first arrive in Italy.

This research concluded that the number of scholarships offered by the Italian government and the HEIs is higher than the number of refugees who join or re-join higher education. The reason for that in most cases is not that those applicants do not meet academic requirements, but they are blocked from accessing university life in Italy because they do not have the right status – mainly refugee and subsidiary protection status. As previously mentioned, just a minority of immigrants arriving in Italy get international protection, so the programmes have more vacancies than eligible candidates.

A first step to solve this problem was already taken by Università degli Studi di Trento and Università Telematica Uninettuno, who managed to provide scholarships not only for those who have already been granted international protection but also to asylum-seekers. An important mission of the institutions engaged in this cause is to find a way to get around the bylaws of the Italian government and welcome asylum-seeker students. The asylum process can take months or even years, and this time frame could be used for the claimants' personal development – what will indeed convert into benefits to Italian society.

A bureaucratic obstacle that needs to be overcome is that of the courses that require entry tests (e.g. medicine and nursing). While foreign students can do this

assessment in English, refugee students – who are considered EU students by law – have to perform the exams in Italian. This tremendous difficulty could be beaten by placing international protection holders within the same category of international students. The test in Italian comprises many points related to Italian culture (where refugees end up missing a lot of points), while other international students are not required to have such high knowledge in tests performed in English.

Amplifying the dissemination of the scholarships available in different media and various languages is also important to increase the number of international protection holders and asylum-seekers who access higher education in Italy. Many of the candidates struggle to find the opportunities, and when they find them other obstacles cross their ways, such as understanding the requirements in a language that they do not master, for example, or the status itself – which is the hardest requirement that they have to meet.

The universities can overcome the status issue by sponsoring asylum-seekers for student visas. If the applicant meets the requirements and the only obstruction to his/her enrolment is not having international protection status, supporting a student visa application can be a way out of this impasse. The support of the rectors of the university is obviously fundamental to this matter.

Another requirement of many universities is the CIMEA certification that recognises the students' previous academic experience, which is issued for free for refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries but has to be paid by humanitarian protection holders and asylum-seekers. The fee for this statement in 2018 was 100 €, a price way too high for immigrants in emergency situations that have been surviving with the government's financial aid.

It is also essential to get more universities involved in the refugee cause. Some universities take as many as 20 students who hold international protection status, while others do not have even one student enrolled under this condition. Furthermore, it is important to give a certain flexibility to the students who are enrolled, following the example of the Università degli Studi di Pavia, who did not introduce a minimum number of credits to be reached by the students every year and also gives them the possibility of asking for an additional year to finish their studies.

One of my most important findings is that the individuals who have the power to promote the integration of migrants in vulnerable situations are mainly responsible for

the success or failure of those initiatives. In institutions where the people are truly engaged in this cause and activities are performed with (com)passion, the outcome is positive. On the other hand, where agents of integration are not entirely committed or motivated to make those initiatives successful, they shall fail to turn universities into more inclusive environments.

Some of the universities are also counting on and encouraging the growing involvement of private initiative representatives to fund a higher number of scholarships. Also, scholarships funded by the private initiative might provide a higher financial value – what would allow students to study, without the need to have a job – besides being easier to negotiate its terms according to the students' needs (pocket money, books purchase, etc).

The Università degli Studi di Bari's initiative to encourage the students to become cultural mediators and help the future groups studying at the institution in the coming years is notorious. New students from foreign countries need guidance to understand the Italian system, and no one would understand better the difficulties of adaptation than those who have been through the same experience. Cultural mediators are indispensable to the integration of international protection holders' into the Italian higher education system.

Establishing agreements between Italian universities and non-EU universities is also a good practice that will have a high impact on the reconstruction of the countries of origin of those students who will eventually go back home. Università Telematica Uninettuno has partnerships with universities throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. That enables the students' diplomas to be recognised in their home countries if they decide to go back. This is fundamental for the reconstruction and development of such countries, so those who obtained their degrees in Italy will not face the same difficulty in having their skills and credentials recognised in their home countries.

The students who participated in this study perceive the opportunity to rejoin academic life at the hosting country as a turning point in their lives. It enables them to validate and improve their professional skills, preparing the ground to enter the Italian job market and (re)achieve autonomy. From the moment they access university, they are no longer labelled as refugees: they are students and professionals with an essential role in global development.



Despite the favourable situation, the challenge remains to increase the access of these immigrants to higher education and to expand the network creating ways to regularize the situation of these candidates so that they can enrol. Hosting countries can only benefit from supporting asylum-seekers and refugees. This is an opportunity of revival for immigrants who were forced to flee from their homes and a chance of development for European countries who are facing tremendous challenges that can only be overcome with human capital. Refugees are resilient by nature, they seldom give up, and that is the most crucial lesson that Europe can learn from them: how to survive the crisis, recover from suffering, triumph and keep battling to empower the next generations.

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# ANNEX

## 1. Survey to the students

02/12/2018

Students' Survey

### Students' Survey

This survey aims to collect data regarding the experience of international protection holders and asylum-seeker students within Italian universities. This questionnaire is anonymous and the information collected is going to be used as data for my master thesis. None of the questions is mandatory. Please, feel free to not answer those you do not feel comfortable answering.

1. How old are you?  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your country of origin?  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your gender?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ Male  
☐ Female  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your religion?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ Christianity  
☐ Islam  
☐ Baha'i  
☐ Hinduism  
☐ Buddhism  
☐ Judaism  
☐ Taoism  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your marital status?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ single  
☐ married  
☐ widowed  
☐ divorced

6. What is your legal status?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ Asylum-seeker  
☐ Refugee status  
☐ Subsidiary protection  
☐ Humanitarian protection

7. Which course are you attending in the university?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ Bachelor  
☐ Master  
☐ PhD  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the name of your course?  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. In which year did you start your higher education studies in Italy?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ 2014  
☐ 2015  
☐ 2016  
☐ 2017  
☐ 2018  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Why were you compelled to leave your country?  
*Check all that apply.*  
☐ Political persecution  
☐ Religious discrimination  
☐ Ethnic discrimination  
☐ Gender discrimination  
☐ Armed conflict  
☐ Natural disaster  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. How many times did you try to flee from your country?  
*Mark only one oval.*  
☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4 or more

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ci6Do8cSzXn-IS2leglmr5zKT5qmMwbHagiZCaUNM\\_c/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Ci6Do8cSzXn-IS2leglmr5zKT5qmMwbHagiZCaUNM_c/edit)

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12. Who did you flee with?  
Check all that apply.
- ☐ Alone
- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Sibling(s)
- ☐ Friend(s)
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you have to deal with people smugglers in order to flee from your country and reach Europe?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
14. How did you reach Europe?  
Check all that apply.
- ☐ By boat
- ☐ By plane
- ☐ By bus
- ☐ By car
- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Was Italy your first option of country to live in when you arrived in Europe?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
16. In which Italian city/port did you arrive first?
- \_\_\_\_\_
17. In which Italian cities have you lived (even for a short period) after your arrival?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
18. Did you know the procedure to apply for asylum before arriving in Europe?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
19. How did you obtain the information regarding the procedure to apply for asylum?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
20. Did you have your identification documents with you when you arrived in Italy?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
21. How long did you have to wait for being granted international protection?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ 3 to 6 months
- ☐ 7 to 9 months
- ☐ 10 to 12 months
- ☐ 1 year
- ☐ 2 years
- ☐ 3 years or more
22. Who you consider to have played an important role in your asylum procedure? (providing information, support, etc).  
Check all that apply.
- ☐ Italian Government
- ☐ NGO
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
23. What was your economic situation in your home country?  
Mark only one oval.
- ☐ Lower class
- ☐ Middle class
- ☐ Upper middle class
- ☐ Upper class
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

24. What was the last study level you completed in your country of origin?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Elementary school  
☐ High school  
☐ College  
☐ Bachelor's degree  
☐ Master's degree  
☐ PhD  
☐ Post-doc  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

25. For how long were you in Italy when you decided to apply for higher education?  
\_\_\_\_\_

26. How did you come to know about the possibility to apply for university?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. Did you have the necessary documents to prove that you completed your studies in your country of origin here with you?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

28. How long did it take for the application procedure to be finished?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ 1 to 3 months  
☐ 4 to 6 months  
☐ 7 to 9 months  
☐ 10 to 12 months  
☐ 1 year or more

29. Did you have any problems to have your previous academic achievements recognized by the university you were applying for?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

30. In a scale from 1 to 10, how hard was it for you to access higher education in Italy? (being 1 very easy and 10 very hard)  
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
very easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
									very hard

31. What were your main difficulties to access higher education?  
Check all that apply.

☐ Recognition of previous academic achievements  
☐ Equivalence of subjects attended in the country of origin  
☐ Language  
☐ Integration with the university staff  
☐ Integration with native students  
☐ Lack of support  
☐ Lack of information  
☐ Understanding Italian culture  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

32. Could you apply for the course you had in mind when you decided to attend university in Italy or did you have to switch and adapt to the options offered by the academic institution?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes, I could choose the course I always wanted  
☐ No, I had to adapt to the university's offer

33. Do you have a scholarship?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

34. Which institution(s) finance(s) your scholarship?  
Check all that apply.

☐ CRUI / Ministry of Interior  
☐ Andis  
☐ The university  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

35. How do you receive the value of your scholarship?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Money "in-hand"  
☐ Services  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

02/12/2018

Students' Survey

36. Are you a full-time or part-time student?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Full-time  
☐ Part-time

37. In which language(s) is your course taught?  
Check all that apply.

☐ Italian  
☐ English  
☐ French  
☐ Arab  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

38. Do you speak Italian?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

39. How did you learn to speak Italian?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

40. In a scale from 1 to 10, how well were you welcomed by the university staff? (being 1 very badly and 10 very well)  
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
very badly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very well

41. In a scale from 1 to 10, how well were you welcomed by the native students? (being 1 very badly and 10 very well)  
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
very badly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very well

42. In a scale from 1 to 10, how integrated to the university do you feel? (being 1 not integrated and 10 very integrated)  
Mark only one oval.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
not integrated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very integrated

43. Do you feel like you follow the lessons in the same rhythm as a national student?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

44. Do you think you get proper support from the university?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

45. Are you provided with psychological support?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes, and I like it  
☐ Yes, but I don't like it  
☐ No, I don't think I need  
☐ No, but I would like to

46. Which expenses does your scholarship cover?  
Check all that apply.

☐ Accomodation  
☐ Food  
☐ Transportation  
☐ Pocket money  
☐ University fees  
☐ University materials (books, etc)  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

47. Is the value of the financial aid enough for your monthly expenses?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

48. If possible, provide the yearly value of your scholarship (in EUR)

\_\_\_\_\_

49. Do you need to work in order to pay for your expenses or send money to your family?  
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes  
☐ No

50. What is your current job position?

\_\_\_\_\_

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Students' Survey

51. Was it hard for you to find a job?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

52. Is your job related to your field of study?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

53. In a scale from 1 to 10, how hard is it for you to conciliate your job with your studies? (being 1 very easy and 10 very hard)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
very easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very hard

54. What do you think could be improved to enhance your experience as a student?

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55. What do you think could be improved in order to make the access to university easier for other beneficiaries of international protection?

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56. Would you recommend to your family or friends in your home country to come to Italy and apply for higher education as you did?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Maybe

57. How do you think this opportunity of studying will change your life in the future?

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58. Do you intend to stay in Italy after finishing your studies?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

59. Would you like to move to another European country after finishing your studies? (For job opportunities or family reunion, etc)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Maybe

60. Would you like to visit your country if you had the chance?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

61. Would you like to return to your country to live there if you had the chance?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

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## 2. Survey to the universities staff

02/12/2018

University Staff Survey

### University Staff Survey

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Marcela Gola Boutros from NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities - Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. The result of this study will be included in Marcela Gola Boutros master's thesis. The collaboration to this questionnaire is voluntary. You have the right to not answer any question.

1. Email address \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Which legal status one must have to apply for the university?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Asylum-seeker  
☐ Refugee status  
☐ Subsidiary protection  
☐ Humanitarian protection  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Does the university offer scholarships for the beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

4. What does the scholarships offer?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Tuition fees  
☐ Books  
☐ Food  
☐ Housing  
☐ Transport  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is the value of the financial awards? (in EUR)

\_\_\_\_\_

6. How are the financial awards given to the students?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ As services  
☐ As money in-hand  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Which institution or person finances these scholarships?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Since when is the university welcoming beneficiaries of international protection?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. How many beneficiaries of international protection were enrolled at the university in each school year since the beginning of the program?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. How many of these students were women and how many were men?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Where were these students from and which courses each of them attended?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What was the criteria to select eligible students among all of the beneficiaries of international protection who have shown interest to apply for the scholarships?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Td748vaiQpDvgY4wFmuyyGmZDN6K9wERe0ORqeZaM1Q/edit>

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13. Were there any rejected applications? If so, why were they rejected?

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14. Which are the institutions, organizations and professionals responsible for the selection procedures?

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15. How was the information about the opening of the application processes widespread among the beneficiaries of international protection?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Newspapers  
☐ University's website  
☐ NGOs help  
☐ Government help  
☐ Propaganda in refugee camps  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

16. How is the recognition of credentials obtained by beneficiaries of international protection and asylum-seekers in their countries of origin done?

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17. Were the scholarships of the students admitted in previous years renewed?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. What are the requisites for the renewal of the scholarships?

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19. How many beneficiaries of international protection are currently enrolled at the university?

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20. In which languages are the courses offered for the beneficiaries of international protection taught?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Italian  
☐ English  
☐ Arab  
☐ Spanish  
☐ French  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

21. How are the courses taught?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ In attendance  
☐ Via e-learning  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. In case of e-learning, does the university have a headquarter and/or administrative units where the students may look for information, libraries, study rooms and support in general?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

23. How did the refugee students welcomed by the university arrive in Italy?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Through the mediterranean sea  
☐ At the airport  
☐ By land  
☐ Through European Union's relocation program  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

24. Do the professors receive any sort of training or orientation to teach and support the beneficiaries of international protection?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_



25. Is the performance of the beneficiaries of international protection evaluated and supervised differently from the other students (e.g.: their grades achievement, the time they need to adapt to the course due to the difficulties they may be facing, etc.)?

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26. In case beneficiaries of international protection have difficulties to follow the lessons, do they receive special tutoring or they are expected to overcome these difficulties with the instruments that the university offers to all of its students?

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27. Does the university have any special programs for the beneficiaries of international protection besides the academic course itself?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ No  
☐ Language courses  
☐ Psychological support  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

28. What are the main challenges faced by the university regarding the integration of refugee students?

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29. Are the conditions under which the beneficiaries of international protection are living, such as food and housing, supervised by the university?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

30. In case the supervision of the living conditions of the students does not concern the university, please, indicate which is the institution or organization in charge of the supervision, if any.

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31. What are the main goals and expectations of the university regarding the future of the beneficiaries of international protection it supports?

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32. Please, provide your name and title:

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33. Do you give permission for the following information to be included in publications resulting from this study?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Your name  
☐ Your title  
☐ Direct quotes from this questionnaire

☐ Send me a copy of my responses.